

**Skagit County Planning Commission
Presentations: Reorganization of Title 14;
North Star Collaborative Overview and Background
January 14, 2025**

Planning

Commissioners: Vince Henley, District 1
Angela Day, District 1
Amy Hughes, District 2
Tim Raschko, Chair, District 2
Joe Woodmansee, District 2
Tammy Candler, Vice Chair, District 3
Kiera Wright, District 3

Staff: Robby Eckroth, Senior Planner
Tara Satushek, Senior Planner
Monica Negrila, Skagit County Director of Strategic Initiatives
George Kosovich, Skagit County Public Health Community Services
Division Manager

Others: Ryan Walters, Legal Consultant

Chair Tim Raschko: (gavel) Good evening. The January 14th, 2025, meeting of the Skagit County Planning Commission is now in session. Happy New Year, everybody. Everybody is present that remains. I'd ask for a motion to approve the minutes of December 10th, please.

Commissioner Vince Henley: I so move.

Commissioner Angela Day: Second.

Chair Raschko: It's moved and seconded to approve the minutes from December 10th. Is there any discussion, changes?

(silence)

Chair Raschko: Okay then, all in favor of approving of the minutes, please say "aye."

Multiple Planning Commissioners: Aye.

Chair Raschko: Opposed?

(silence)

Chair Raschko: Okay, thank you. The first agenda item tonight is a presentation on the Reorganization of Title 14 to Improve Residential Permitting by Mr. Ryan Walters. Welcome.

Ryan Walters: Good evening, Planning Commissioners. My name is Ryan Walters. I'm a private legal consultant to the Planning Department, although I was also the Assistant Director once upon

a time, and also prior to that a Deputy Prosecuting Attorney working for the Skagit County Planning Department.

So I have some familiarity with Title 14, which is largely the development code for Skagit County, and the Planning Department in its efforts to improve residential permitting performance here. Last fall – as you probably recall – we passed revisions to the permit procedures, and that was a pretty significant effort – basically a complete and total rewrite of those procedures. Now what we’re proposing is a reorganization, but really something less than a rewrite, of the remainder of Title 14. So in the presentation tonight I’m going to take you through sort of what we’re proposing at a pretty high level – it really mirrors exactly what was in the memo in your packet – so that you have an early look into what we’re thinking about and you can provide any comments either now or later as we start to draft this effort.

First of all, why? Why are we doing this? First of all, the title that is in front of you, Title 14, the one that you work with every day, was adopted in 2000 so we’re going on 25 years ago. Like the procedures that you did last year, it is in need of a refresh because quite a few things have changed in state law, quite a few things have changed in the organization of the County over the last 25 years. And so there are things that require more efforts and things that require less. As an example, we have a whole chapter devoted to Master Planned Resorts. We have precisely zero in Skagit County. But we thought they were going to be a big thing at the time. So we’ll retain that as we go through here but it will be kind of moved aside, and you’ll see how some of the reorganization will really improve the flow and usability of the chapter.

As a general matter, we want to improve readability and usability, so in some cases that’ll involve a little bit of rewriting for more plain language. But really the primary, principal objective is to do a couple of important things to streamline residential permitting requirements. As an example, a variance process, which is expensive and time-consuming, is required anytime a house can’t fit on a lot due to setbacks. And in some cases setbacks are larger than maybe they need to be given the size of the lot that is predominant in the zone. So we’re going to be looking at that and seeing how we can improve that.

Almost every permit requires a lot certification and that process is more cumbersome than maybe it needs to be so we’re going to be looking at substantive improvements there.

And then wherever we can, we’re going to convert lengthy paragraphs of text and lengthy lists into tables. Lists are preferred in plain language drafting over long blocks of paragraphs and narrative, but where lists are comparable to each other they really should be tabular – presented in a table. So we’ll do that.

We will remove things from Title 14 that aren’t development regulations. So there’s the Open Space Tax Program. That’s not a constraint on development. It’s not a development regulation. We will propose to move it out of Title 14 and put it in another title of Skagit County Code.

Generally, I like to characterize this as reorganization with limited rewriting. We’re not starting from scratch here. We’re not proposing to rewrite the entirety of Title 14. There will be some substantive changes. Maybe ideally we would say it’s purely reorganization, but in addition to the couple of items that I’ll mention here tonight you will get a separate presentation from the other consultants who are working on the Comp Plan and the development regulations about things they see in the code that need to get edited to comply with GMA or to comply with changes to the Comp Plan.

In terms of reorganization, we're going to have some new – a new organizational scheme inserted into the title. So right now it's Title 14 and then there's a number of chapters beneath that. We're going to insert divisions so related chapters can be grouped together. And I think it'll be clear here in a second when I go through that organization. We're going to create *more* chapters, so especially online, where the code is usually found, you will have, I think, an easier time browsing it. Because related information will all be in a chapter and the chapter is always visible at the top level of hierarchy when you're browsing the code online.

In terms of rewriting, we will do plain language where it's relatively easy to do without a really substantial number of edits, or where we're proposing something new. If we're writing something anew anyway or changing in a substantial way – rewriting it anyway – we will do plain language.

Converting text to tables, as I mentioned, there is a lot of duplicative language, especially in the zoning chapter, and so we will seek to get rid of that. And then we will try to align terminology. We did a lot of this in the procedures code update. But we are going to try to use the same words for the same concepts in all cases.

And then finally, we have all these Administrative Official Interpretations where the Planning director over the years has made judgments about what the code means. And a best practice is to – whenever those occur, to then propose them to be integrated into the code text itself. That has never happened but now's a good time to do that. So we're going to pick up the Administrative Official Interpretations and put them into the code so that anybody reading the code can find out what the Department believes that the code means without having to go to a separate webpage or other repository to find a list of Administrative Official Interpretations. Now also keeping in mind that when we did the procedures update last year we changed the term administrative official to director. So now these are called Director Interpretations. They're still on the website as an AOI. But the goal here is to integrate all that directly into the code.

I'm not going to go through all this, but these are some of the plain language drafting techniques that you saw in last year's presentations about the procedures update. Still the same thing as we are trying to achieve with this update.

So here's the meat of this. And this might go pretty fast so you can feel free to interject, ask questions. You can also follow up later if you think of other things afterwards. But right now Title 14 is *the* place that we're talking about, right? Title 14 is currently in 20 chapters. 14.16, for example, is very long. We don't want long chapters. We'd prefer shorter chapters. The reorg would create six divisions, as I mentioned, and then it would break those existing long chapters into shorter ones, and it would look kind of like this. So first of all we would have a General Provisions division. We're not going to number it for a reason that'll become clear in a moment. And then we'll have Division 1. Zoning and land uses will be grouped together – multiple chapters within this division. Division 2, Special Entitlements – things like special use permits, those kinds of things. Land divisions, of course, and then Land Disturbing Activities. I'm currently seeking alternative names for this division because I'm not sure if I like this one yet. But that's what I've got in the draft. And then Division 5 for Critical Areas and Shorelines. And Division 6 will be for Public Facilities.

So let's get into this a little more. I've got bullets under each one here.

So under General Provisions, we'll retain Definitions. That will not – that chapter number will not change. We'll keep it where it is, 14.02. We're not numbering this division because it would be called Division Zero and I really don't like that. So this one's just general and Definitions and

Permit Procedures would also stay in the same chapter that it's currently in. Legislative Procedures would stay where it is but right now it's called Legislative Actions. It's very procedural. We just change the name. The other consultants might have a couple of edits for that that I'm not aware of, but anything that they propose, other than in Critical Areas, will wrap up into this same package so you'll be looking at it all at once. And then Enforcement Procedures. That's currently in a later numbered chapter. We'll move it up here because it's general and generally applicable. We're not planning to rewrite it, though.

In Division 1, Zoning and Land Uses, we'll move Lot of Record here, I think. There's a possibility it might move elsewhere. And then we'll break up the existing Zoning chapter. Now this is probably the most of the meat of this project. Because right now the Zoning chapter is – it's got a list of all the zones. It's got all the uses in the zone. It's got the lot coverage limits, the setbacks for each zone. None of those are in tables. And then it gets into other things – the performance standards for various types of uses. Those kinds of things will all be in their own chapter. So a chapter for those dimensional standards, the things that are susceptible to being put into a table – the setbacks and that kind of stuff; lot coverage in its own table. And then the uses in their own table. And that's particularly useful because, you know, the code as written is just a really long list of all the zones and all the uses. And frequently what happens is every once in a while somebody says, Hey, we should put that in a table. And so staff go back and they assemble a table and then almost immediately after they put that table together it becomes out of date because something gets changed. So what we're going to do is put all of that in the table in the code so you're not maintaining in the back room a supplementary document that compares all of that stuff. So you can just – everybody can see it and read it and apply it just directly from the code. But also, so as you're looking at it for readoption, you'll be able to see that in different zones maybe there are certain differences between uses, and if there's not a real reason for that you'll see it immediately because it'll all be in a table right next to each other. Ideally we would want to consolidate any differences that don't have a basis. If they do have a basis, that's fine. Maybe they were intended to be that way in some particular zone. But otherwise we'll be able to harmonize the uses so that they – you can see where they exist in a zone or where they don't. Maybe they're just missing – that nobody has noticed before because they weren't in a table.

So that's a lot of the meat. Setbacks, as I mentioned, will live in here but we'll also seek to make substantive changes to that to eliminate the need for variances, so that people can get permission to do, you know, the house or whatever it is that they're trying to do without having to go through a – what is it? – 3,000, 4,000-dollar variance process and multiple months.

Division 2, Special Entitlements, would have special use permits, as I mentioned before, but also development agreements. I don't know that the County has ever – since 2000 – entered into a development agreement, but we have a chapter for that. We're not proposing a rewrite but we're proposing to put it in here. Master Planned Resorts, same. And then Variances. We really seek, as part of this rewrite, to reduce the need for variances, but sometimes they will be required and so those will live here.

Division 3, Land Divisions, will have probably a chapter on preliminary subdivisions and final subdivisions. And then its own chapter on CaRDs and its own chapter on binding site plans. All of this is currently all wrapped up in a single chapter. And then another chapter on how you alter or vacate a subdivision, and then also on boundary line adjustments. Now importantly, boundary line adjustments are not a land division but we're putting them here in this division because it makes sense because it's very related. We titled the division "Boundaries and Land Divisions" to make sure we capture all of that without implying that you can create new lots through a boundary line adjustment.

Division 4 – and this is the one that I’m entertaining suggestions for new names for – but it would include the current Land Disturbance chapter, the current Stormwater chapter, and then the current chapter on the Right-to-Manage Natural Resource Lands. Not proposing a lot of changes there. Just moving those around.

Division 5 we would reserve for Critical Areas and Shorelines. That’s currently 14.24. And that chapter will be revised by other consultants as part of the Comp Plan Update. So staff have indicated they would like to break that chapter up into multiple chapters. One chapter for each type of critical area basically. So what we are proposing to do is to defer that to a second phase. Because we want the consultants to make those changes, get the changes adopted. It’ll be a separate package and separate ordinance from this one. And then once that’s done, we could come back and do the reorganization. But because critical areas tends to be something that can become controversial, we want to focus and have people very focused on whatever the substantive changes are that the consultants propose and that makes its way through this process, and not at the same time looking at a complete reorganization where people can’t track what those changes are. So that is our current approach. If we continue on that path, what would happen is we would create the division named this but we would not delete the chapter, which is currently 14.24. We would keep a space open in Division 2, which is where 14.24 would line up with the other chapters, and then we would come back in a second phase and reorganize that after it is adopted and after its appeal period has expired.

Shorelines, similar story. The Shoreline Plan contains those regulations. They’re currently assigned to Chapter 14.28. We would move them here into Division 5, which means their chapter number would start with a 5. But those are still pending with the Department of Ecology. They haven’t been approved yet. So we’re not going to do that as part of this package. We lay out the organizational scheme so that that can be done later when they’re ready.

And then finally, Public Facilities. We have a Concurrency chapter that needs someplace to live, so that would go here. There’s also a chapter on the way you build Public Works, and so that would appear in this division. And then we have a chapter on Impact Fees and we would insert that chapter here as well.

In terms of substantive changes, as I mentioned those amendments to the code that are required by changes to GMA or that are otherwise being worked on by the other consultants or directed by changes that we’re all making to the Comp Plan as part of the Comp Plan Update, those will come into this package except for critical areas, because that’s going to be a second separate package. The setback streamlining that I mentioned will be here in this package. The lot certification streamlining. We don’t necessarily know what that looks like yet but we know that it’s an obstacle that we want to eliminate. And this will not increase development permissions. The objective here is not to make certified lots out of lots that aren’t certified. The objective is to make it easier to get to the yes without as many hoops to jump through.

Then we also have a URDP, a separate – it’s called an Urban Reserve Development Permit. It’s a separate permit for land divisions that occur in the UGA. Without changing the substance of the outcome, we want to eliminate the need for another permit. So that would just – we would try to roll that up into the land divisions that you’re already pursuing rather than having another permit overlay on top of that land division.

In terms of the schedule here, it was a couple weeks ago we met with staff and then the other consultants that are working for staff on this code organization scheme – tried to get coordinated a little bit. This work session tonight is to brief on these changes and solicit any early feedback.

And it might be too much for you to have feedback now, but that's okay because it's going to take a little while to get this drafted. And then April 6th is when we are due to provide these revisions to the Department and for the Department then to publish them for public comment. May 6th, public hearing, and then May 20th, Planning Commission deliberations and your recommendation. This is a draft schedule. The Department, I think, maybe considers some of this a little bit in flux but it's what we have at the moment.

And then finally we expect the Board to deliberate in June and we're hopeful that maybe they might adopt before the end of June because that's the Comp Plan deadline. The development regulation – some of these elements of this package are really not mandated by GMA so aren't subject to the deadline, but there are other deadlines that are important here so we're hopeful that June is when it makes its way all the way through to the Board and the Board makes a decision.

So that's my overview. That's what I have for you tonight. Do you have any instant reaction or questions about this effort?

Vice Chair Tammy Candler: I do.

Chair Raschko: Go ahead.

Vice Chair Candler: It's probably hard to figure out where to put it, but the Master Planned Resorts is in something called "Special Entitlements"?

Mr. Walters: Yes.

Vice Chair Candler: Is that – it seemed like the other things that were in that group seemed more like entitlements to me. Not similarly situated –

Mr. Walters: Well, that division is intended to be sort of a catchall for these things that not everybody gets, right? So a special use permit or a variance are not things that everybody needs to pursue, not that you're entitled to get. Similarly with Master Planned Resorts; similarly with development regulations too. So that's why we've grouped them together there. If we were starting from scratch, we might call that division "Permits." But there's nothing about ordinary permits proposed to be in that division, so that's why we didn't do that.

Vice Chair Candler: Yeah. You don't like the name "Land Disturbing Activities" –

Mr. Walters: I'm just not 100% sold on it.

Vice Chair Candler: – which I think is great. It sounds like a cheesy horror movie or something. I think it's a good name. But "Special Entitlements" bothers me more for some reason; I don't know why. And then so the General Provisions can't be a division because you had to make it 0? How can it be?

Mr. Walters: Yeah, so – let me see if I can quickly back up here. So for each of the chapters that are under each division, we're going to start with a number.

Vice Chair Candler: Ah.

Mr. Walters: So Division 1, all the chapters will be 10, 11, 12, 13, 14. For Division 2, all the chapters will be 20, 21, 22. And I really like that approach because then you can predict with certainty which division a chapter is in, especially for navigation on the website. I don't really like "Division 0." I've seen it elsewhere. There's even a Chapter 00 in one of – or a Section 00 in one of the chapters of the existing code. I don't like that. So I've tried to avoid that without renumbering this.

Vice Chair Candler: And I'm a little – I like the way you've done it. It's great. But I'm just – like, so many – how – the General Provisions chapter, how *do* you know that then? How is that going to be organized?

Mr. Walters: Well, the division numbers would not apply to – you wouldn't pick up those division numbers and integrate them into the chapter numbers. The chapter number stands by itself.

Vice Chair Candler: But you're going to have to have some kind of an outline format, so what type of numbers are you going to use?

Mr. Walters: Oh, yes. All of the existing chapter numbers. So for instance, the permit procedures you did last year, 14.06, it does begin with a zero. That number system wouldn't change. So they would all be numbered, consistent – basically all those chapters that are in General Provisions, with the exception of Enforcement, which we've moved there, would not get renumbered and they'd have all the same numbers that they do now.

Vice Chair Candler: And so you don't mind that being different from the remainder, like having a whole new scheme for the remainder but leaving that the same?

Mr. Walters: I don't because we can avoid renumbering those chapters as a result. If we were starting from scratch, maybe we'd do it a little different, but I kind of think that's the right compromise.

Vice Chair Candler: So when you say Division 1 is Zoning and Land Uses, is that taken off of a template from somewhere else? I'm sure there's a reason why they're named the way they are in that order. Like –

Mr. Walters: I put "Division 1" there because 14.16, the current zoning chapter, has that number, and so then I can keep that number in that division. Because one of my objectives was to limit the amount of renumbering and to be able to find some things at their existing numbers. As an example, we have a lot of lot certifications that are recorded with the Auditor that have a certain citation to 14.16 and I kind of wanted to preserve that number there with some new text that says, Hey, this got moved. It's not essential. You know, things change over time, but I was trying to thread that needle of retaining a placeholder so that if somebody looks up one of those documents they can get to a location in the code that makes – that is meaningful to them.

Vice Chair Candler: That makes a lot of sense. Thank you.

Mr. Walters: Yeah.

Chair Raschko: Commissioner Woodmansee?

Commissioner Joe Woodmansee: Hold it up on the Master Planned Resorts line. What is the – and under the Special Entitlements, is that a zoning entitlement basically if you were to _____ division?

Mr. Walters: Yeah. The Master Planned Resort requires – if I recall correctly, it requires a Comprehensive Plan amendment as well. The only time in my recollection that the County has considered that was for Clark's Cabins – you know, up Highway 20?

Commissioner Woodmansee: Uh-huh.

Mr. Walters: You might be familiar with that. But that didn't go anywhere. I think maybe also many years ago – 15-plus years ago – 1000 Trails at Bow Hill was considering that but it also didn't go anywhere. There's ways to get to the recreational use without doing a Master Planned Resort and a Master Planned Resort under GMA. It's not a wholly Skagit invention. It's under – GMA requires a significant natural amenity and so you have to demonstrate that. For Clark's Cabins it was going to be the Skagit River but it was between the highway and the shoreline and so he kind of ran out of space. And at Bow Hill, I think it was going to be Mount Baker, which is not actually in Skagit County so that was a little bit of a stretch to call that the significant natural amenity. So that's why, I think, those have never been pursued or approved – unless they have in the last five years and I haven't been paying attention.

Commissioner Woodmansee: Is it like a binding site plan? If you got a resort plan, is it like a binding site plan?

Mr. Walters: I don't know that it allows a land division.

Commissioner Woodmansee: That's what I'm trying to figure out.

Mr. Walters: If it did, I think we would put it –

Commissioner Woodmansee: Same piece of property with a resort plan, basically.

Mr. Walters: Right. Yeah. I mean, it might. Again, I haven't had to look at this recently. And we're not proposing to make a lot of changes there. I mean, probably go through it and change some wording for plain language, but otherwise just move it over. It doesn't seem to require the same level of effort as the other things in the code since it's never used.

Chair Raschko: Anybody else? Commissioner Day?

Commissioner Day: Thank you. Thank you for your presentation. I have two questions. It sounds like you're going to make something that I've heard referred to in other jurisdictions as a "use matrix."

Mr. Walters: Yes.

Commissioner Day: So you can look up, for example, what's possible in what zone. But how will that interact when you have different sections of – for example, if you want to look up a use but it's only available in that zone through a – this – you know, a special use permit? Does that just say that there and then refer you to that new section? Or if you want to look up where a battery storage facility, for example, might be allowed – which is a public facility – how will that all work within that use matrix?

Mr. Walters: So maybe I should have included an example of kind of what we're thinking, but what we anticipate is a table, probably more than one table because there are some zones that are – natural resource zones probably have their own table – right? – because they're very different from the *non*-natural resource zones. They don't have all the same uses, for example. And so maybe in the Rural Reserve zone it will have – that table will have Rural Reserve as a column, Rural Intermediate as a column –

Commissioner Day: Yeah.

Mr. Walters: You know, several other similarly-situated zones –

Commissioner Day: Okay.

Mr. Walters: – as a column. And then the uses as the rows. So a single-family residential would probably be a use, or however it reads in the current code. And then you'd have a "P" or a "C" or an "A" – you know, a letter in each cell. "P" meaning outright permitted; "C" meaning conditional Use; "A" because you have an administrative conditional use. So some level to represent a lower level of a conditional use. Some other jurisdictions use a number instead of a letter. I think here we would go with the letter. And then like we did with the Shoreline Plan – I don't know how many of you participated in that process or not, but the Shoreline Plan has a use matrix in it and on each row we have a code citation. So, for instance, to take your – well, let's use something – anything other than your example.

(laughter)

Mr. Walters: So a kennel. If a kennel, a dog kennel, is listed as one of the uses, it would say it's permitted in this zone, it's conditional in this zone.

Commissioner Day: Yeah.

Mr. Walters: And then the final column would be the note, and so it would include the code citation to the kennel use, where you could go learn about all the special requirements for the kennel. And in that section it might say sure, it's permitted in this zone but – you know, not under these circumstances or with this additional requirement, or something like that. And that way we will seek to avoid a lot of footnotes. Because frequently in these use matrices they end up just littered with 20, 30 footnotes. I don't like that. I don't think it's particularly readable. So what we've been able to do in most other cases is have that code citation where you can jump to read all about it, which you're going to want to anyway. If you're pursuing a kennel, you're going to want to know what the constraints are, and then anything that seems like it would ordinarily get a footnote would also be in that code section. Does that answer that question?

Commissioner Day: I think so.

Mr. Walters: Okay.

Commissioner Day: I think that having hyperlinks also makes things easier, if you're looking at it, you know, online. So that would be helpful.

Okay, second question is related to including the administrative official – now the director's – interpretation included in the code. So, you know, the code is a legislative enactment and an

administrative official determination is something different. And is there any confusion or problems about, you know, questions or legal challenges by having them intermingled in that way?

Mr. Walters: Well, so they wouldn't – I guess at the end of the day I wouldn't consider them to be intermingled because they won't be labelled as "administrative official interpretations" in the revised code. They will be "revisions to the code."

Commissioner Day: Okay, so that's even – I feel like more problematic potentially. If you have code that's enacted by a legislative body, the Board of Commissioners, and then you have an administrative official making an interpretation that's essentially creating new code, that seems problematic. It seems like it should be separate.

Mr. Walters: So I would characterize it this way, and an example might help. So the code currently says that in the agricultural zone that a single-family residence – or residence at all is an accessory use to the principal use in the agricultural zone, which is farmland, right? Farming. And so a number of years ago – this was probably 2008 – the administrative official made the determination – with the support of the County Commissioners – made the determination that when the code says that a residence is an accessory to the principal farmland use, that means you have to show a certain amount of ag income to demonstrate – *income from farming* – to demonstrate that your residential use is accessory and not just you wanted a house in farmland. So that was an administrative official interpretation. It went through that Administrative Official process; however, if the legislative body – and I would count the Planning Commission as part of that process – didn't agree with that interpretation, you really didn't have a way to weigh in. So the idea here is that Administrative Official Interpretations – what are now called Director Interpretations – would come back and we would gather up all the ones that have been issued over the last 10, 15 years and they would be integrated into the code. So the code would read you must demonstrate this amount of ag income in order to be considered an accessory use and thus allowed on farmland. It'd be part of the code. If you don't like that outcome, you will have the chance to weigh in and effect a different outcome.

Commissioner Day: So essentially the past administrative decisions will become code through a legislative process.

Mr. Walters: Right.

Commissioner Day: Okay.

Mr. Walters: And because you're part of that process, you can effect it, right? Where they don't come into the legislative process, you have no voice there.

Commissioner Day: Right.

Mr. Walters: And the County Commissioners do only because they can hire and fire the Planning director and tell him what to do. But otherwise they don't get that opportunity to craft it in the legislative process and neither does the public. So that's why we inject them into this package.

Commissioner Day: So what will future decisions by the director – will that just automatically be incorporated into code or will it also go through a legislative process?

Mr. Walters: They will never automatically. They cannot be automatically incorporated into code.

Commissioner Day: Okay.

Mr. Walters: I think – although others may disagree with me – that a best practice is to move them on an annual basis into the legislative process for codification. Well, and for approval as part of the code.

Commissioner Day: Right. Okay, thank you.

Mr. Walters: Yeah.

Chair Raschko: I had the exact same questions – a great feeling of discomfort about these administrative interpretations. The way I see this process working is that the existing administrative interpretation is just blended into the proposed new code and gets approved. I would appreciate it if it was demonstrated which are the administrative interpretations so that they can be differentiated from the existing code.

Mr. Walters: Yep.

Chair Raschko: So that they can be addressed by the Planning Commission.

Mr. Walters: We will do that in the draft. We'll use those blue and yellow highlighted boxes like we did last year in the permit procedures update so that you can see where a thing came from. We're not going to do the strikethrough and underline because – we will in some cases, like in Master Planned Resorts or maybe development agreements where we're not making a bunch of changes. It'll be pretty easy to show it in strikethrough and underline. Where we're doing a bunch of reorganization it'll be impossible, so we'll use those blue and yellow boxes – very similar to the approach that we took in displaying that information in the permit procedures update. So you'll be able to see it.

Chair Raschko: All right. And also, I'd appreciate again – I missed what a URDP is. Can you –

Mr. Walters: Urban Reserve Development Permit.

Chair Raschko: What Reserve?

Female Commissioner: Urban.

Chair Raschko: Urban Reserve.

Mr. Walters: Yeah. I'm not an expert on this and I'll not – although I guess I'll become one – but I think the objective there is to prevent the subdivision of land in the UGAs into lots that aren't going to get annexed by a City.

Chair Raschko: Right.

Mr. Walters: And I may have that characterized a little bit incorrectly but basically it's another level of permitting and I think we can accomplish that without having that separate level just by putting the standard into the land division itself.

Chair Raschko: Okay.

Commissioner Day: I just have one question.

Chair Raschko: Commissioner Day?

Commissioner Day: I echo Commissioner Candler's concern about the title "Special Entitlements." I think land deserving is fine. I think that's actually clearer. But I don't think it's an entitlement if it has to go through a process like the Hearing Examiner's process. How about something like "Special Uses and Procedures" or –

Mr. Walters: It's not procedures, but especially since several of you have mentioned it now, "special permits" maybe would be a more apt title, or –

Commissioner Day: But it's something – it's a use that can only be achieved through a public process, right? A quasi-judicial process?

Mr. Walters: Almost, but not always.

Commissioner Day: Okay.

Mr. Walters: A development agreement, for instance, is legislative and the Master Planned Resort, because it requires a Comp Plan amendment, also has a legislative component. So it's not always quasi-judicial.

Commissioner Day: But it's not necessarily an entitlement. You aren't just automatically entitled to a particular use without some kind of exemption or –

Mr. Walters: No.

Commissioner Day: Permission.

Mr. Walters: Well, right, yeah. I mean, that's a good point; however, we use the word "entitlement" to talk about the result of the process to get the entitlement. But if it's confusing to you, then it's maybe a word we shouldn't use here.

Commissioner Day: Special Uses and Permissions? I don't know. There's got to be something better.

Commissioner Woodmansee: Maybe just strike the word "special."

Mr. Walters: Well, I think "entitlements" maybe has been _____.

Commissioner Woodmansee: Your entitlement's when you get the approval.

Mr. Walters: Land use professionals, I think, would use "entitlements" a lot. But, again, we're trying to write it not for land use professionals, so.... We'll come up with something else.

Commissioner Day: Just a thought. Thank you.

Chair Raschko: Anybody else?

(silence)

Chair Raschko: Okay. Well, thank you very much.

Mr. Walters: Thank you. See you again in a couple months.

Chair Raschko: So we have next a presentation of the North Star Collaborative Overview and Background. Please, Ms. Satushek.

Tara Satushek: Yes, thank you. I would like to introduce Monica Negrila, the Skagit County Director of Strategic Initiatives, and I believe George Kosovich will be joining her – Skagit County Public Health Community Services Division Manager.

Monica Negrila: Good evening, Commissioners. Is my mic on? Okay, awesome. Good evening, Commissioners. My name is Monica Negrila. As Tara mentioned, I'm the new Director of Strategic Initiatives here in the Commissioners' office. I started my new role in October of 2024 so I'm a few months here in my role. I am very honored to be here and to meeting you all tonight. My role is a new position at Skagit County and was specifically created to help lead and support the North Star Initiative to begin with.

So as you probably saw in your memo tonight, we are here to provide with an overview of the North Star Initiative and Collaborative and the second piece in part will be focusing on efforts to address housing affordability. So George will be presenting with me in a few minutes.

So really I'm going to provide a brief overview and background of what the North Star Collaborative is. I'm going to walk with you through some of the structure and how does it work; why North Star; what is it really; what are the visions and some of the strategic pillars that were identified. And I'm going to provide a brief summary of what was accomplished to-date, and then I'm going to invite George over to focus really on the housing piece. We also have a few members of the housing task force with us. We have the Planning Directors from Mount Vernon and Burlington with us. So thank you so much, Stacie and Brian, for being here.

And so we are also going to be available for questions. I can pause at any point if you have any questions, or we can also definitely have questions and discussion at the end.

Okay, so what is North Star and why North Star? Really as many communities across the nations have been grappling with how to address homelessness, also here in Skagit County homelessness has been increasing over the last several years. And we at Skagit County realize that this is more complex than just one county and one jurisdiction being able to solve it on their own. So really that is the driving force behind North Star – really to find a collaborative mechanism to work together as multiple jurisdictions to really solve and tackle communitywide complex issues such as homelessness and behavioral health.

So in July of 2022 the mayors of the four cities in our county, along with the Commissioners, got together to really form North Star. And that's how the initial collaborative started. The goal was to provide and create a solution-focused mechanism to share resources, to leverage limited resources that each of them has, to have a shared decision-making process to really tackle these challenges and challenging issues.

So initial structures were created for the collaborative. Currently the North Star Initiative is led by the leadership team. The leadership team is composed by the four mayors of the four cities Mount Vernon, Sedro-Woolley, Burlington, and Anacortes, and the County Commissioners. In addition, there is an advisory group that brings together professionals from multiple sectors – from housing,

human services, nonprofit community service providers – and also has representation from the city councils of the four jurisdictions.

And in addition to the advisory group, we have currently three specific task forces. These are technical groups that work on specific issues in the community. For example, the housing task force is here with us. Some of the members are here with us tonight. You're going to hear more about that. We also have a recovery task force that focuses on behavioral health issues in the community, as well as crisis and poor response issues. And then we have the most recent task force focused on working with law enforcement and fire on the co-responder programs that exist in our communities.

So how is North Star unique? I think really, as I mentioned earlier, most likely the most unique feature of North Star is that's your decision-making between and that collaborative approach between cities and counties. Knowing and learning that the County cannot do alone and cannot address homelessness alone or none of the municipalities can address homelessness alone. Really, I think one of the biggest unique feature is that partnership and really coming together to look into how to leverage resources, how to best align various policies and decision-making process(es).

In addition, the fact that the initiative and the collaborative tackles system-wide issues is also unique and trying to move the needle on the behavioral health system, and housing as a group makes it more unique and, frankly, it gives more leverage in trying to really tackle some of these challenging issues.

So along the way over the last couple of years as the North Star Collaborative developed, a vision was also developed, and it's pretty simple. One is that no one in our communities has to live in their car or on the street or, frankly, die in their car or in the street. The second one is that everyone can get the services that they need when they need them, and this is focused on the behavioral health system in particular and the recovery system. And then third, that really our key partners know what North Star is and they want to be part of it. Altogether the vision is, simply put, all of Skagit thriving, the focus and the goal being that we would work together as a system to improve all services and the life for all Skagit community members.

Just for in a couple of words, I wanted to talk to you a little bit about our target population and why we chose this. So really knowing that homelessness is such a complex issue and knowing that we cannot solve it alone we want to start it with those who are most vulnerable and those also that cost the system the most. Significant dollars are spent on homelessness and the crisis system, really, and these are taxpayers' money. And we realize that by continuing to spend a large amount of dollars it really prevents us from investing in upstream and more preventative solutions. So we really wanted to start where the most money are being spent, hoping to help fill the gaps. So that's why our priority population is those who have chronic homelessness.

And so with that, before I move forward to talk to you a little bit about the strategic pillars and what are some of the goals and some of the accomplishments, I can pause to see if you have any questions, or should I continue with the presentation and questions at the end? Do you have a preference?

Chair Raschko: (unintelligible)

Ms. Negrila: Continue. Okay. So also over the last couple of years during us as the collaborative evolved and really dug roots, a strategic framing and a strategic planning process was developed

and three pillars were developed of focus for the initiative. One is durable governance passing and funding, and this really focuses on bringing resources into the region and creating the system and the structure that's going to be long-lasting. The second one is really working towards an effective community-based system of care. And as I mentioned, this really focuses on the behavioral health system and filling in the gaps, but creating a system that is working for all community members in Skagit County. And the third one is really focusing on creating stable and safe housing for everyone with the primary focus on affordable housing.

These are just the specific goals within each of those strategic pillars. Under the first pillar, really our focus is to further strengthen the public-private partnership that exists. And as I mentioned, creating that sustainable operational structure for the collaboration, and also improving integration of community voice, making sure that the community voice is integrated in a meaningful way.

Under the second pillar, our goal is to really increase capacity for the behavioral health services currently both at the adult level and youth level. The behavioral health system is in a deep crisis, not only due to shortages in staffing but services and capacity for services and availability. So trying to really increase that body of work. We are also working on improving the crisis and co-response management system crisis outreach services and expanding the existing recovery support services.

And I'm going to let George talk more about the housing piece in just a few minutes, but really the goal in that area is twofold. On one end we want to build a pipeline for affordable housing and then secondly we want to focus on policy and decision-making in really ensuring those pathways for housing, making it easier; therefore, that cross-jurisdictional alignment working with all the municipalities as well.

So in just a couple of sentences, some of the accomplishments so far and some of the wins. I think probably the biggest one when you talk about resources, the Collaborative was able to secure over 40 million dollars in new funding to bring to the region, both for housing and behavioral health system. You may be familiar with the Skagit Star Center that broke grounds last year and is scheduled to open in 2025. That creates additional beds for detox, ___ treatment and stabilization. A lot of work has been done in implementing software that will allow first responders and crisis workers to best coordinate services, so that is the Julota coordination software service. And the goal of that is to really help all jurisdictions involved in collaborating with one another. For example, if there is a community member who receives services in Mount Vernon today, they might be in Burlington tomorrow and so that software system would allow outreach workers to really communicate and better coordinate services.

On the government's side of things, a lot of work has been done, as I mentioned – some of the structural pieces, creating the leadership team and creating the structure, then the various advisory groups that help support the initiatives. Those have been in place. I was hired as the first path of the initiative, so I hopefully will consider that as a win as well. And in the – again, I don't want to focus too much on the housing pieces. George will talk some more about it. But funds were secured for shelter services. A call to action was created by all jurisdictions, in alignment in creating policies to make it easier for developers and for those who would like to build housing.

So with that, I'm going to pause and invite George to ____ and giving you more information about the housing piece. Thank you.

George Kosovich: So thanks, Monica. Again, George Kosovich. I work in the Public Health Department in the Community Services Division, so that includes affordable housing

development, homeless services, behavioral health programs. So that's the connection to my work. What I'm going to do is just dive a little deeper into the housing section. We could do something similar around co-response or behavioral health programs, but given that you all are a planning commission the intersection really is housing, and so that's what we're here to talk about.

So a little bit more detail on the North Star housing vision – something we set up to kind of guide the work. Three bullet points really focused on the idea that communities throughout Skagit County can benefit from more supply of housing and a more diverse supply of housing to meet their needs; an idea that 10 years from now we could have a rental vacancy rate that's stabilized at around 5% and residents at all income levels have greater choice for housing. And then the idea I think that we can all appreciate that at the same time we're able to produce more housing types that meet people's needs, we're preserving agricultural land, natural areas, and open space, consistent with the Countywide Planning Policies and the idea that most of that new development and new construction is going to take place in cities and Urban Growth Areas.

I want to take a little, quick diversion and talk about homelessness, and it may not immediately connect to what you think of as your role as a planning commissioner for the county, but there are connections. And so I just want to talk a little bit briefly about drivers of homelessness and what that looks like in Skagit County, share a little bit of data.

In terms of the drivers of homelessness this is something that's been researched. I've got a screenshot from a book that came out in the last few years summarizing that research, called "Homelessness is a Housing Problem." And I think if you're curious about – you know, if you're into statistics and curious about correlations, really what that body of research says is that the two top drivers for homelessness are the cost of housing – so rental rates – and vacancy – so the availability of housing. There's a lot of debate in the media about the impacts of substance use, about domestic violence, which are certainly issues that lead people into homeless situations. But when you look kind of at the data about why do some areas experience increasing rates of homelessness or higher rates of homelessness, it really comes down to that availability of housing and cost of housing. And that's an area where we, like a lot of communities along the west coast, have a challenge. So statistics on the right, the average rent for housing in Skagit County is now \$1407 a month. Pretty significant amount for families to afford. It wasn't that long ago – 10 years ago – the average rent was \$900 a month. So we've seen some pretty significant increases. And, you know, similarly, a 5.9% increase year-to-year last year, which is the highest increase in rent for – we just picked a two-bedroom apartment, but we've seen those rent increases. And so that creates a challenge around homelessness.

A little bit more data. You know, Monica talked about populations that we were focusing on. Homelessness data – there are a lot of different sources, and all of them, like any data source, have their imperfections. What I did was just share some information about the point-in-time count. That's an actual, physical count of homeless folks in Skagit County. It's done for a single night in January. It's coming up in a couple of weeks. Volunteers and many organizations go out and count folks. You can see the trends again. About 512 individuals were counted last year. There's a mix of sheltered and unsheltered individuals. It just gives a snapshot of who was available. I think one of the things we hear anecdotally, particularly in more rural areas of Skagit County, in those unincorporated areas, that there are people that are hard to count. They're living in encampments. They're, you know, looking to not cause trouble and not be seen and so it's definitely an undercount but it gives you some indication. There are other data sources. School districts track what they call a McKinney-Vento Rate for homelessness – slightly different definition. In the school district, there were 801 identified homeless. That's just the youth. That includes a different definition than HUD lets us use for the point-in-time count. So that's a little bit

of kind of characterizations of the numbers. Seventy-nine percent of the folks that were counted in the PIT count last year reported their last permanent address was in Skagit County, so the majority of the people are from here. Their last residence was here. And then we look at kind of the race and ethnic breakdown of those folks in Skagit County. As a whole, 28% of our population identifies as non-white. For those people seeking homeless services, the rate is 40%. So there does seem to be some disproportional race and ethnicity tied to needing homeless services.

Monica talked a little bit about serving vulnerable people. Again, point-in-time count data for homelessness. This sometimes looks different, depending on the population and people that you have seen data before maybe looks different than your picture of what you think of as homeless in Skagit County. Almost half of the individuals have a disability, either physical or developmental; almost half would identify as having a mental health disorder; about a third have a chronic physical health condition; about a quarter have experienced domestic violence; 22% chronically homeless; 2% veteran. And then the other thing I would call out – two things I would call out in terms of ages on the slide. Thirty-two percent of the people that are counted as part of this count are 17 and younger, or children. So a third are children. And then there's a significant aging population that's counted as part of the point-in-time count, so 20% 55 and older.

So that's just a little bit of a snapshot to say, What are the issues we're experiencing in Skagit County? I kind of want to get into the call to action. So I think one of the unique things that we've got happening in Skagit County is – through North Star – is this interjurisdictional cooperation. So I've worked in Skagit County long enough around housing issues that there's been a little bit of history sometimes of blame and finger-pointing. So people blame the jurisdictions for making it hard to develop. The jurisdictions say, well, it's the developers who develop housing. We don't do that. And so there's been a little bit of acrimony sometime that's between the County and the Cities. And so I think North Star has opened that up, kind of getting that dialogue going. The task force really sitting down with each of the Cities and the County at the table and saying, What would make the most difference in terms of developing affordable housing in the county? And we got the mayors and the County Commissioners to sign on to this call to action identifying these four opportunities. So again, not pointing fingers at one City's parking requirements or one City's zoning regulations, but just saying, We can do more. We can do better to serve our community members' needs. So again, this was signed on by the County Commissioners and the four mayors. The four items are around allowing mixed use development outright in commercially zoned transit-served corridors; adopting by-right permitting in residential zones, so eliminating some of those discretionary review processes as long as you meet the code requirements; reducing parking requirements for affordable housing projects in transit-accessible areas; and then reducing impact fees for affordable housing, especially for smaller housing types.

So those were based on our housing task force that the planners and task force members thought would make the biggest impact. I think just kind of my observation is these are largely going to impact more urban level developments and city level developments. I just want to kind of acknowledge that and call that out. That is where we expect most of the affordable housing to be developed – in cities. And I know through the Comp Planning process and allocation, that's where most of those lower income units have been identified where they go.

In terms of what's next, though, I think there really is a role for you all as planning commissioners in this process and it really comes down to the – it's that broad first bullet of continuing to support regulatory changes across jurisdictions that promote faster housing production. So it's not going to look the same necessarily in unincorporated Skagit County as it will in the city, but I think there will be opportunities for thinking differently about housing for all income populations. And I know you all have consultants working on Comp Plan processes and they – I've seen some drafts that

have been published around needs identified, and I know that there will be some opportunities identified. And so I think the ask for you all really is to look for those opportunities, and you've got a professional staff of long range planners that are going to bring you those opportunities, and we would just hope that you keep kind of this population in need and mind in thinking about: Are there some things that can be done differently to support everybody's housing needs, regardless of where they fall on the income spectrum?

The second set of bullets are really around, you know, what can we collectively do to increase the supply and diversity of housing sizes. So we're looking at what Monica references as an affordable housing pipeline. So how do we work together to fund some of these projects? Some of the money that's come into the community are examples, and they really resonate with funders when you have jurisdictions co-funding, when you have a county and a city co-funding an affordable housing project together. It just increases the likelihood that they're going to get state funds. We're looking at identifying and securing new sources of funding, piloting new housing models, some of which we know we want to integrate and embed some of those behavioral health services. And then really looking – we've looked at County- and City-owned properties to see what's the possibility for turning some of those into affordable housing.

So that's the kind of thumbnail sketch of housing. I think what we wanted to do is I'm going to turn it back over to Monica for a little bit more discussion.

Ms. Negrila: Thank you, George, and thank you, Commissioners. Really you heard the ___overview about North Star, some more specifics about our work on housing. We would love to open it up for questions and the conversation, and we have a couple of questions as well. So based on what you heard from us tonight, what do you see some of the opportunities and challenges in possibly future collaborating or collaboration between North Star and the Planning Commission, and how can we in North Star support your work?

So those are some of our questions, but, again, we are here to answer any of the questions that you might have as well.

Chair Raschko: Go ahead, Commissioner Day.

Commissioner Day: Thank you. Well, thank you both very much for all of your work and for your presentations. I think this is just – it's really admirable to see. I get the sense that this was sort of initiated at your level outward to elected officials, and I think that's just – I just commend you for all of your efforts and I really look forward to seeing the progress that you're able to make.

I think one thing that would be helpful for me as a commissioner is to see – your bullet point examples are very helpful – to see more ideas, perhaps from other jurisdictions about how we can create more affordable housing, especially – you know, we're in the county and so creating those most affordable housing units are difficult outside of the cities and Urban Growth Areas, and I know that you understand that. So any examples that you can bring to us, or recommendations or ideas, I think would be very helpful for us. And I guess I would also just ask how, you know, how we can support your work outside of, you know, helping to shepherd through some of the recommendations that you might have for more affordable housing units. So thank you very much for being here, both of you.

Ms. Negrila: Thank you just the same and yes, we look forward to continuing and bringing back items too.

Chair Raschko: Commissioner Candler?

Vice Chair Candler: Are you – can you tell – I would be interested to hear a little bit more about the Star Center. It's – like, when is it opening? What's the target population? What is it offering? What's it about?

Mr. Kosovich: Happy to answer that. So I don't know if you're familiar with the site. It's in Sedro-Woolley right off the highway next to the existing Evaluation and Treatment Center. It's under construction now, slated to be completed towards the end of this year, early next year, so opening – what we've been telling folks is early 2026. It's got three components to it. So it's a higher level detox. So we have an existing detox facility in Skagit County that's sub-acute, which is great but it means, like, first responders can't drop directly to that location, so this'll be a higher level of care where first responders will drop off. It'll have 16 more beds of crisis stabilization, so if somebody needs kind of immediate help they don't really need to be in an ER but they need to be seen by a professional. It'll have that level. And then it will have another 16 beds of co-occurring treatment, so a little bit longer stay – 30, 60, 90 days – if somebody needs it in terms of actual treatment beds, because that's a challenge in the community.

Chair Raschko: Commissioner Wright.

Commissioner Kiera Wright: Thank you. Just two questions: look at opportunities. What opportunities are there in your housing pipeline for ___ home ownership? What level are we going to go? Do we have a measurable goal beyond just housing and reducing those numbers? But countywide, how can we make this a bigger project to have permanent residents really thriving?

Ms. Kosovich: Yeah, great question. So homeownership's definitely on the list. And we talk a lot about renters but the pipeline includes some Habitat projects and so that's on the list. In terms of our ability to track some additional funding, we landed a Commerce down payment assistance grant last year that we're putting to work through some nonprofit organizations. So that's – we don't necessarily have to do the construction of housing. It provides down payment assistance and then a long-term affordable housing covenant so it stays affordable. So home ownership's definitely a piece of the mix. You know, in that case the need there is often that subsidy to help somebody in it. But there have been some discussions around – with organizations like Habitat around things like surplus public land that could be a good opportunity for a Habitat project. So definitely on the list. I think those projects tend to go up to 80% AMI, so are affordable for people that wouldn't otherwise be able to afford to purchase a home in Skagit County.

Commissioner Wright: Thank you. Also a follow-up question, or ___ question. When talking with your bullet points about pilot housing models in neighborhoods with behavioral health services, the connotation in the community is low barrier housing ___ the neighborhoods and it's not safe for children. What do we have in the works to change that narrative that we have these positive opportunities? I feel there's a challenge in what we perceive, _____ we already have the first step at Martha's Place – just some of the negative situations. How can we overcome that together?

Mr. Kosovich: Yeah, I think exactly that – kind of talking about successes and looking for opportunities to highlight those. I think on the positive side again, we've seen kind of a – we haven't seen community backlash around affordable housing development or ___ a health facility development like some other communities have seen. So we have to maintain those kind of positive relationships. So I think the best thing that we've done in both, you know, Martha's Place and First Steps was be kind of transparent, be clear about what has happening, and do that engagement with community members too.

Commissioner Wright: Thank you.

Chair Raschko: Go ahead, Vince.

Commissioner Henley: Well, I wasn't going to say anything, but I think I need to ask the question: What's changed? Because the trend is not for *less* expensive housing. The trend is for, if anything, *more* expensive housing, okay? We're not really working in a way where we produce things like rules, regulations, codes, and so forth that make it easier to construct homes. They're all oriented towards, you know, things, for example, that are so-called green. And that has an additional cost, not a lesser cost. So what I'd like to see is – or have you tell me, what has changed in terms of you being able to address the increasing costs of housing as opposed to the decrease?

Mr. Kosovich: Yeah, there's a lot to unpack in that question, and I think I agree with the majority of – what you're saying is even in the affordable housing development realm, the cost to construct housing and the requirements to get funding has increased. And so, you know, ___ particularly for public financing. There are a lot of additional requirements that make it costly to develop housing. So I think the – you know, it comes back to advocacy at the state level to keep highlighting to the folks at the state level about what additions to state building code – how that translates back to costs. And then I think for North Star we've really focused on: What can *we* influence locally? So, you know, that can be – well, what if we are able to find some public land and provide that at no cost? That decreases development costs _____.

Commissioner Henley: See, I think advocacy is a very good thing and it might even produce some results. But in the overall scheme of things, if you can't get the cost down, it's not going to be useful. You do have to get the cost down at some point.

Ms. Negrila: It's a fair question and I think that's why we are here. And I think I'm not sure that we have a magic answer to that, but we would definitely love any ideas that you have.

Commissioner Henley: Well, I seem to have left my magic wand in my ____!

Chair Raschko: Okay, Commissioner Hughes and then Commissioner Woodmansee.

Commissioner Amy Hughes: I'd just like to thank you for taking your time tonight to come share this with us, and I'm really excited to hear about the mixed use priorities in our county. As I look at the different stages in life, especially at this stage that I'm in, I think it would be really nice to have a mixed use option to move into, to free up my house for a family to move into. A walkable area, but, more important, an all-inclusive area to where we start to feel like a village again and we're not so distant. So I applaud the efforts of this project going forward.

Chair Raschko: Okay. Joe?

Commissioner Woodmansee: One question I had was, you've secured over 40 million in new funding. So where is that 40 million going? Where's it going or where has it went?

Ms. Negrila: So part of that went and is going towards the Star Center that you heard about. And also additional funding has been going to different nonprofit partners for additional shelter and services.

Mr. Kosovich: Yeah, I think we have the list on the North Star website, which Monica's going to reference on a slide of the funding leverage. The biggest is the Star Center. There's a big win for

the Volunteers of America affordable housing development. It'll be going in Burlington. That's going to serve low-income families and 12 veterans. But the list, the breakdown is on the website and we've got that and can get that to you.

Commissioner Woodmansee: So it'd be fair to say that a majority of those funds are in actual housing, some type of housing?

Ms. Nagrila: Housing and behavioral health services, yes.

Commissioner Woodmansee: And I consider that, you know, temporary housing, but it's still housing.

Ms. Nagrila: Mm-hmm. And the website that George was referencing is northstarskagit.org.

Chair Raschko: Anybody else?

(silence)

Chair Raschko: Is Welcome Home Skagit part of your operation?

Mr. Kosovich: So from a service side, we definitely engage with them – funding for extreme weather shelter and day shelter activities. Yeah.

Chair Raschko: But it's a separate organization?

Ms. Kosovich: Yeah.

Ms. Nagrila: Yes, they are separate. Yes. But we coordinate with – is it fair to say *all* service providers in the area? *Most* of the service providers in the area that provide any services to homeless youth or adults and crisis services behavioral health.

Chair Raschko: Well, I want to join the other people in commending you for what you're doing. I think this is extremely important. And, gosh, we really need to succeed, so thank you. Please.

Commissioner Wright: Sorry for the follow-up. Just look at the __ youth you mentioned. I know from personal experience some students they get kicked out of their home on the weekends or wherever their temporary shelter is. What can we do better for providing them a place to go over the weekends and the off hours they're not in school at summertime and breaks? Is that part of your conversation to really hit the lower need, because they're – they might be emancipated youth. They're 16, 15, 14 – can't work, don't have access to the – you know, insurance and other things, but they need a place to be when they can't be at their temporary shelter. Do we have anything bigger planned, beyond Oasis Teen Center that does have those restrictions. I know we have reasons why but there's a big _____.

Mr. Kosovich: Under 18 gets complicated for a number of reasons. There is a really strong effort in Skagit County coordinating between different youth service organizations – it's led by the Y and Northwest Youth Services – to make it easy to identify and support youth kind of quickly. And so they've got some flexible services in funding. If you don't know, they've kind of rebranded about the Anchor Communities Initiative. I'd love to connect you up to them.

Commissioner Wright: Thank you.

Chair Raschko: Anybody else?

(silence)

Chair Raschko: Great. Well, thank you very much.

Ms. Nagrila: Thank you so much.

Chair Raschko: So tonight we have Public Remarks. That's an opportunity for anybody from the public to speak to the Planning Commission on any subject they wish. Is there anybody who wishes to speak to the Planning Commission?

(silence)

Chair Raschko: No. Is there anybody online?

Ms. Satushek: If you are online and would like to provide public comment for the Planning Commission, please unmute yourself.

(silence)

Ms. Satushek: It doesn't look like anybody.

Chair Raschko: Okay, so we will dispense with Public Remarks. We'll move on to Nomination and Election of Officers for 2025. The floor is open for nominations. Commissioner Day?

Commissioner Day: Thank you. I would like to nominate you to continue on in your role as Chair, Mr. Raschko, Commissioner Raschko.

Vice Chair Candler: I will second that.

Chair Raschko: Are there other nominations?

Commissioner Woodmansee: I would nominate that Tammy continue in her role.

Commissioner Wright: I second that.

Chair Raschko: Are there any other nominations?

(silence)

Chair Raschko: Okay. So we'll vote for – all right. Everybody in favor of the –

Several Commissioners: Aye.

(laughter)

Chair Raschko: No no no no no! For Chair and Vice Chair, please say "aye."

Multiple Commissioners: Aye.

Chair Raschko: Then opposed?

(silence)

Chair Raschko: Okay. Thank you. I vote your – appreciate your vote of confidence, if that's what it is.

Commissioner Day: It is.

Chair Raschko: Okay, thank you. Can we now have a Department Update please, Ms. Satushek?

Ms. Satushek: Yes. So today the Board of County Commissioners approved the moratorium on agritourism. It was just an extension of the existing one that's happening so that – it goes into effect today and it's a six-month extension while we work with the Department and with you, the Planning Commission, for the agritourism remand. We'll probably get back to you with that following the Comp Plan process.

Speaking of that, our next meeting I also have the consulting team, Kimley-Horn, who will be briefing on the existing conditions data by our draft elements with the Comprehensive Plan, and then going over the draft Vulnerability Assessment, which is required by the Climate element for the Resilience sub-element. That information drives the policies for the Climate element, and then there's the two sub-elements and Greenhouse Gas Reductions policies. And then also they will provide a community engagement summary to-date.

And that's all I have for updates right now.

Chair Raschko: Any questions?

(silence)

Chair Raschko: Okay, thank you. So, Amy, have you anything for the rest of us?

Commissioner Hughes: I do have a question. Are we sticking to the March Planning Commission calendar pretty much – the three meetings in one week possibly?

Chair Raschko: Is that the one –

Commissioner Hughes: Yeah, the 11th, the 12th, and the 13th possibly – to leave those dates open.

Chair Raschko: And was one of those a public hearing?

Vice Chair Candler: Yes.

Ms. Satushek: That is correct. The first one would be the public hearing; the second one would be public hearing, if needed to continue, and deliberations; and then the third day would be deliberations, if needed. So three days are scheduled but they don't necessarily need to go three days if the business is concluded within two days.

Chair Raschko: Well, thank you for bringing that up. I quite frankly find it problematic to have a public hearing and then have to deliberate one day later. I don't think there's enough time to

properly prepare – you know, go through all the material you’re going to have. Are there any other opinions or –

Commissioner Henley: Yes. You decided. I had to do it. First of all, I’ve got an administrative question. Are we no longer getting mileage reimbursements?

Chair Raschko: You asking me? I’ve never gotten that.

Commissioner Henley: No. I’m asking the staff. And if we’re not, when was that and why?

Ms. Satushek: So I can provide an update on that. We’re working with our Administrative Coordinator to update the procedures, because previously it may have not been done correctly because mileage was being reimbursed not as a volunteer. Volunteers aren’t eligible for reimbursement so right now it’s currently being worked out with the Commissioners’ Office and, I believe, the Auditor’s Office. Just the fine-tuning of actual paperwork –

Commissioner Henley: So I assume it will catch up at some point?

Ms. Satushek: That is my understanding. But we will definitely get back once we have the correct information to provide to the Planning Commission.

Chair Raschko: Could we go back to –

Vice Chair Candler: Can I say something?

Chair Raschko: Please.

Vice Chair Candler: First of all, I appreciate both of you guys bringing up things that affect my creature comforts!

Commissioner Henley: I have another thing.

Vice Chair Candler: But going back to Amy’s comment, I brought this up at the – when I first saw that it was announced and was objecting kind of softly, wanting some more input. But I tend to agree with what’s been said. Well, I don’t know what _____, but that’s a quick turnaround to try to process what may be a lot of comments. I would not be opposed to trying to set a more normal schedule for that.

Chair Raschko: Any other thoughts on that? Yes, Joe?

Commissioner Woodmansee: Yeah, I concur, and I’ll publicly apologize that I didn’t jump on your bandwagon that night. I feel like that the three nights in a row is too much, and the quick turnaround from hearing to deliberations doesn’t give us any time to digest the information that we’ve been given. So I’d rather see it get a more normal process.

Chair Raschko: I’d like to request that we have some space between the –

Ms. Satushek: Okay. Yes. I will check with the consulting firm and our department. I think it was basically a scheduling issue. That’s why it was done that way. So I’m not certain if we’re able to readjust it, but I will push along that request. But I believe it was because there are so many different consulting firms that will be present.

Chair Raschko: Okay. Commissioner Day?

Commissioner Day: So I heard *legends* about this Planning Commission staying here until midnight or 2 a.m. And if this is the alternative – having three days in a row – I support that. If there is no better alternative, you know, I don't know. But I think three days in a row with sort of a more predictable beginning and ending would be preferable to pulling an all-nighter. I don't think that serves the public well either.

Chair Raschko: Well, I am in no way envisioning having an all-nighter.

(laughter)

Commissioner Day: Yeah. I've heard stories. I haven't experienced it.

Chair Raschko: We'll ___ this topic and then we'll switch back to the other one. Amy, did you have something else?

Commissioner Henley: I have another thing.

Chair Raschko: Okay, but we're still talking about this meeting.

Commissioner Henley: All right, ____.

Commissioner Hughes: I'd like to concur with the statements regarding the respect that I give the public for their public comment. When they spend their time to listen to what we do to step forward and have a say, I feel I need to process that information. I try to keep my mindset free until all the information is put in front of me and then I need that time to – what we've said – process. And I think it's an important part of what we do.

Chair Raschko: Anything else on that subject?

Commissioner Woodmansee: I have a question on procedure. If we have a hearing on Monday and we say we're going to deliberate on Tuesday, does that mean that all the public comment, written and/or verbal, comment period ends on the hearing night?

Ms. Satushek: So usually the written public comment ends a few days before, but then you're able to provide testimony/public comment at the public hearing.

Commissioner Woodmansee: So usually the written public comment period ends before the public hearing?

Ms. Satushek: Correct.

Commissioner Woodmansee: Because it seems like if something could come up at the public hearing that needs public input.

(several Commissioners make affirmative sounds)

Commissioner Woodmansee: And so and it seems to me like, you know, if you're not at the hearing but you watch it the next day because you couldn't be there or something, and you lose your opportunity to comment on something because we've prematurely closed the public

comment period. So it seems like there should be some amount of days past the public hearing for the – because I think normally there's a period of days past the public hearing typically that public comment can still be had or heard or given.

Vice Chair Candler: I feel like that's correct because we sometimes tell people who ran out of time that they're not precluded from putting that all down in writing and sending it in.

Chair Raschko: That's the way it's been in every public hearing that I've been involved in.

Ms. Satushek: Right. So I need to apologize and clarify that, because we usual do have a basket to provide for any comment, and it's not like a hard and fast deadline. I mean, it is to a certain extent. But there is also opportunity to also provide those at the Board level as well. So I just wanted (you) to also know that. Obviously we want the public comments to be here but it's not the only place where public comments will be received. But ideally it would be here, but I just want to also reiterate for the public that there's a second opportunity at the Board level.

Chair Raschko: Okay, so we have three meetings in a row scheduled. Three nights. Okay. So there's a meeting with an agenda and then there's a public hearing on the second night.

Commissioner Day: No, it's a public hearing only.

Vice Chair Candler: Public hearing and then maybe more public hearing –

Chair Raschko: A public hearing on the second night.

Vice Chair Candler: No.

Commissioner Woodmansee: There could be.

Ms. Satushek: So what we have here tentatively is a briefing, so a work session, and then a public hearing, and then deliberations. Oh, excuse me! I apologize. I read the wrong one. A public hearing; and then a public hearing continued, if needed, and deliberations; and then the third day would be deliberations, if needed.

Chair Raschko: The third day's what?

Ms. Satushek: Deliberations, if needed.

Chair Raschko: Oh, okay. So it's potentially three nights.

Commissioner Wright: She said a minimum of two, though. At least two nights out of three for sure, correct?

Ms. Satushek: Right. Because if we're advertising the public hearing on a certain day and deliberations another day, we'd have to advertise those – notice those separate.

Chair Raschko: My preference would be to have a public hearing and then the next week have a special meeting for deliberations.

Ms. Satushek: Okay. I will push that along – that request along to the Department.

Chair Raschko: Does anybody –

Commissioner Day: No, I agree.

Commissioner Henley: I think a little bit of space is useful.

Commissioner Woodmansee: It'd be more appropriate.

Commissioner Wright: So we still have two nights to do our public hearing for the public, correct? One? One long one, or two short?

Chair Raschko: Well, generally we get out of here at a reasonable hour. But this could be a big public hearing. What has been done, in my memory, is you set a time limit, like 9:30, and you try to move it along. And if you have to come back the next night, you come back the next night. We've not done that, that I remember.

Vice Chair Candler: Because it has to be set.

Ms. Satushek: Correct, yeah. So if you were to hold an additional public hearing, you would have to public notice it.

Chair Raschko: So if it goes over the second day, you'd have to public notice that then.

Ms. Satushek: Correct. Yeah. So right now –

Chair Raschko: And that's got to be a week in advance.

Ms. Satushek: Fifteen days.

Chair Raschko: Fifteen days. We have to get it over that night, so it might be long.

Ms. Satushek: Or you could advertise ideally – I mean, you wouldn't want to cut off the public comment period if there's more folks from the public that are here. You would have to table the public hearing for another time. So that's where we get a little bit of the time stickiness, given the Commissioners' priority that we have this project wrapped up by the end of June.

Commissioner Day: What about two nights of public hearing? The second night, if needed, and then the following week the deliberations?

Chair Raschko: My understanding – what she just said is the second night would have to be advertised 15 –

Commissioner Day: Right.

Vice Chair Candler: But she can do it now.

Chair Raschko: Oh, she can do it now. Of course.

Commissioner Day: Yeah, she could do that now.

Commissioner Woodmansee: You can do it now, but how do you cancel the second night?

Commissioner Day: Yeah, but if we don't need it?

Commissioner Woodmansee: How do you cancel the second night? Maybe somebody can't come the first night.

Ms. Satushek: What we do is you put an email – we do it all the time. Not all the time, but when we've cancelled meetings here you just put it out "subject to cancel." We could also put a disclaimer, like "Public hearing continued if needed," and then we would just use Facebook, listserv – you know, communicate the best we can – posted on the door.

Commissioner Woodmansee: So what would you do if somebody contacted you and said, Well, I can't be there on the first night but I can be in there on the second night and I want to speak at the public hearing?

Ms. Satushek: That hypothetical I don't know. I'd ask them to provide written comment.

Chair Raschko: Well, I'd say they can't make the public hearing (laughs).

Commissioner Woodmansee: All I'm saying if you're going to advertise it *might* be on this night it's hard to – it's like either/or.

Commissioner Wright: People plan around their schedule and I think –

Commissioner Henley: You've got to give notice.

Ms. Satushek: If needed. There's a disclaimer, "if needed," so it gives you and staff a flexibility. It's not saying that it *has* to happen. It's just saying it can continue if needed.

Commissioner Woodmansee: It may be perfectly normal to do that. I just haven't seen it done before.

Chair Raschko: Okay, so have we got this covered?

Commissioner Wright: Yeah. Back to your point that I apologize. So if we cut them off and we don't use a second night, their written comments _____ the same week, so we're trying to say as well then, we need that gap. So whether it's one night or two of the public comments, we still want or asking for –

Vice Chair Candler: Deliberations.

Commissioner Wright: – deliberation time because of all those extra ___ that might come in.

Chair Raschko: All right, it is now Commissioner Day's time – Day's turn to have comment, if she wishes, on any subject.

Commissioner Day: Mine?

Chair Raschko: Yeah.

Commissioner Day: Okay. Well, I just wanted to say thank you –

Commissioner Henley: Are we to now yet?

Commissioner Woodmansee: He's working backwards.

Chair Raschko: We're getting there.

Commissioner Day: Thank you, Mr. Chair and Commissioner Candler, for your willingness to continue to serve in your leadership roles, and I appreciate it very much. Thank you.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Yes? Your turn.

Vice Chair Candler: Thank you for your vote of confidence. I certainly don't want anyone to feel like, you know, they can't at some point want to be chair or vice chair.

Commissioner Henley: You're so good at it, that's why. If you were incompetent we wouldn't vote for you!

Vice Chair Candler: Thanks. I appreciate it. I sit here very well. But I don't have any other comments. Thank you.

Chair Raschko: Vince.

Commissioner Henley: Okay. As you probably know, the Hearing Examiner approved the battery storage facility and so that is eventually probably going to go in over in Sedro-Woolley. What you probably *don't* know is that the National Fire Protection Association has been working on codes dealing with battery storage facilities. Now I happen to be a member so I –

Commissioner Day: I think that was at Bayview Ridge.

Commissioner Henley: – get to read all this stuff. Go ahead.

Commissioner Day: I think that was at Bayview Ridge, not in Sedro-Woolley.

Commissioner Wright: Burlington was approved.

Vice Chair Candler: Bayview Ridge, not Woolley.

Commissioner Henley: Say it again.

Vice Chair Candler: She's thinking it's Bayview Ridge, not Sedro-Woolley.

Commissioner Henley: It's not Bayview Ridge. I don't know. Maybe it is. Okay.

Chair Raschko: It got approved.

Commissioner Henley: Maybe it is. Anyway, in any event, it's been approved and it is probably at some point going to be built. I think the plans are rather nebulous right now. Anyway, the NFPA has been working on codes or having to deal with these batter storage facilities for some time. They're not yet ready to release the codes and they probably will impact, you know, what we do here in Skagit County because the way it works, organizations like the NFPA and the ICC, they create model codes and then usually the states or various jurisdictions change them to satisfy

themselves and they become codes with the force of law. Now what I've got here I'm going to pass these out. This is a research paper that was just done by the NFPA and the director of research for the NFPA, Birgitte Messerschmidt, is here. So just take one and pass it down. You don't have to read it now but this explains a lot of the things about implementing these kinds of facilities, and I think it's important that we understand what's going on. And Tara, I've got copies for the staff if you want.

Ms. Satushek: Okay, thank you.

Commissioner Henley: So anyway, I think it's important that we begin to understand what's going on in the world of codes, in particular with battery storage facilities, and especially if they're lithium ion storage facilities. I mean, the protocol is still let it burn out. But, you know, we've seen what happens when too many things get burned out so I think that we should at least understand, you know, what measures are being taken for containment and what the current research is on how to deal with these things. Because they're ubiquitous. We have battery storage facilities, which are very big things. But you probably know this, that a lot of the power tools that are sold today have lithium ion battery storage cells, okay? Your laptop computer and your cell phones have lithium ion storage cells, and they are all subject to being damaged and bursting into flames spontaneously. So it's worthwhile to understand how this all works. So anyway. So my gift to you! It is a research paper.

Chair Raschko: Thank you.

Commissioner Woodmansee: Yeah, I want to thank the staff and the consultants, who are gone now, for their efforts. It's usually very thorough and they're really good about taking questions, and we'll have more in the future, I'm sure. But I also want to say how much I appreciate our leadership on our commission and it's seamless and it's – you know, it's tried to be done very fair and consistently, and I really appreciate that. I know it's not a small thing to take those roles and the responsibility that comes with it. And so thank you for doing that.

Vice Chair Candler: Thank you.

Commissioner Henley: Okay.

Commissioner Wright: Just real quick, Happy New Year, everybody, and ditto to all the comments. Just a reminder that we have two openings _____, and applications are due January 31st and there's more information on our website, but if you live in District 1 or District 3, we have some space for you up here. We'd love to welcome some new faces. I'm still the newbie so I need another rooky to my right, please. So again, please join us on the Planning Commission.

Chair Raschko: Okay, I just want to say first of all that my feelings wouldn't be hurt if somebody else was chair.

(laughter)

Chair Raschko: Okay. Enough said. I don't mind doing it. Second, I'd like to publicly thank both Kathy Mitchell and Jen Hutchison for the time they spent on this commission. I enjoyed them both. They're both good people and I'm going to miss them. But we'll welcome in some good new people here one day. So that's all I have. So I thank everybody tonight and we will stand adjourned (gavel).