



## Whatcom County Housing Advisory Committee MEETING AGENDA

Thursday February 8, 2023 8:30-10:00 AM

Hybrid: Civic Building 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Conference Room (322 N Commercial St) & Zoom

Agenda Items		Time
1.	Call to Order, Introductions and Roll Call of Members Present (Dan) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Membership update</li> </ul>	8:30 – 8:35
2.	Agenda Review (Dan)	
3.	Action Item: Approval of December 2023 Minutes (Dan)	
4.	2025 Comprehensive Plan required by the Growth Management Act – presentation and feedback requested from Planning and Development Services (Lucas Clark) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GMA Compliance</li> <li>• Council Priorities</li> </ul>	8:35 – 9:15
5.	Health and Community Services Update <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Severe weather shelter, Healthy Children’s Fund RFP, Small Capital Projects RFP, projects awarded 9% LIHTCs and Commerce grants</li> </ul>	9:15 – 9:35
6.	Executive’s Office Update (Kayla)	9:35 – 9:40
7.	City of Bellingham Update (Samya)	9:40 – 9:45
8.	Whatcom Homeless Service Center Update (Teri)	9:45 – 9:50
9.	New Business	9:50 – 9:55
10.	Public Comment (2 Minutes Per Person)	9:55 – 10:00
	Adjourn (Brien)	

Next meeting: Thursday, April 11, 2024, 8:30-10:00 AM

*Community members who require special assistance to participate in a committee meeting are asked to contact the meeting facilitator at least 4 business days in advance.*  
[ageleyns@co.whatcom.wa.us](mailto:ageleyns@co.whatcom.wa.us)



# Whatcom County Housing Advisory Committee

## Meeting Minutes

**Meeting Date/Time/Location:** 12/14/2023 / 8:30-10:00am / Hybrid: Civic 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Conference Room & Zoom

**Committee Members Present:** Adrienne Renz, Ann Beck, Brien Thane, Bruce Bosch, Dan Dunne, Dawna Morse (late arrival), Dean Fearing, Kayla Schott-Bresler (late arrival), Mary Lou Steward, Samya Lutz, Teri Bryant, Von Ochoa

**Committee Members Absent:** Ashley Thomasson, Diana Phair, Tara Sundin

**WCHCS Staff/Guest Presenters:** Ashley Geleynse, Barbara Johnson-Vinna, Chris D’Onofrio, Eric Chambers, Michaela Mandala

Agenda Item	Report/Discussion
1. Call to order, introductions, and roll call	<p>Introductions commenced and quorum present.</p> <p>This is Mary Lou Steward’s first meeting as one of two Small Cities Representatives. Ashley Thomasson and Dean Fearing’s first terms end 1/31/2024, and they are both eligible to reapply.</p>
2. Agenda Review	<p>Dan requested to review a draft letter to Bellingham City Council regarding the Urban Forestry Management Plan. This item was added to the end of the agenda.</p>
3. Chair and Vice Chair Nominations and Vote	<p>Ann nominated Dan for chair, Samya seconded. There were no other nominations. Ashley T. was not at the meeting, but Brien spoke with her beforehand and confirmed she is willing to serve another term as vice chair. Ann nominated Ashley T. for vice chair, Adrienne seconded. The committee voted and the motion passed. <b>Yes: 10; No: 0; Abstain: 0</b></p>
4. Approval of Minutes	<p>Samya moved that the minutes from the October 2023 meeting be approved, Ann seconded the motion. The motion passed. <b>Yes: 10; No: 0; Abstain: 0</b></p>
5. 2024 Housing Contracts Budget Overview	<p>Chris provided a high-level overview of the of funding anticipated and committed for services and capital projects in the 2024 calendar year. The first two charts show a breakdown of local, state, and federal funding sources. Of note, the Emergency Housing Funds, which have some federal restrictions due to some incorporated ARPA funding, will continue in the second half of the grant cycle, but likely to be rolled into the CHG grant.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dan requested clarification on disclaimer that amounts in charts are estimated and may change. Chris explained that Finance/Council has yet to approve some contracts, and not all funding anticipated or available is in contract yet (i.e. Small Capital Project RFP).</li> <li>• Kayla - It would be helpful to see how the funding allocations compare to population data. The Coordinated Entry Governing Body is starting to look at data to determine where there are disparities across the system.</li> </ul>



	<p>The third chart shows specific interventions and broad contracting categories. Of note, 24% of the budget is intended for capital projects.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Samya – It would be helpful to see services/capital split overtime, looking at budgeted and actual amounts.</li> <li>• Dan asked if there are any funding sources that are difficult to spend, or certain funding that we could use more of. Chris explained the issue is more the overall capacity to address all issues at the same time, not so much particular funding restrictions preventing us from supporting a particular intervention.</li> <li>• Von asked if there is any funding going directly to schools. WCHCS does not have any contracts in place with schools for housing services, although a family with school-aged children could be staying in a motel paid for by the County through a contract with community agencies. Samya shared that the City of Bellingham funds Family Resource Center staff. Ann added that the County does contract with school districts around mental health services.</li> <li>• Samya flagged \$18k of General Fund in the anticipated budget for the Access ID program that will be relevant to City of Bellingham’s update later in the meeting.</li> </ul>
<p><b>6. Interest and Intent to apply for 2025 LIHTCs</b></p>	<p>9% Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) is the dominant source of funding for affordable housing capital projects. This committee is responsible for designating projects to move forward as a way to show local support, rather than having several applications from multiple developers in the same year. The funding availability is not at the level to be able to fund a project every year, but we can expect that three to four projects over a five-year period can be awarded 9% LIHTCs in Whatcom.</p> <p>There are three potential projects that could move forward for 2025 LIHTCs, so conversations have occurred and will continue with the three developers to determine a strategic order based on project readiness. At this point, there is a general consensus among the three developers about which project is most ready. There’s an identified need to develop a more streamlined process to stagger projects that provides more predictability for developers. Next summer, the committee will be asked to endorse a project that has been prioritized by developers who have submitted intent to apply for 9% LIHTCs through the Washington State Housing Finance Commission. Staff will keep the committee updated on pipeline developments periodically.</p> <p>Members of the committee discussed the background of the local collaborative process for pipelining projects. Adrienne asked about process transparency, if developers who hadn’t participated in the process before would know where to plug in. Agencies can submit interest and intent applications to the County, and the County welcomes conversations with new or smaller agencies that are interested in this type of development.</p>
<p><b>7. Health and Community Services Update</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Several severe weather and winter shelters will be operational this winter season, including: Road2Home’s winter shelter at Civic Field, WCHCS’s Bellingham severe weather shelter, and through more hotel room stays for families with children. Councilmember Galloway was on the call and spoke the committee about the current thresholds and capacity issues, whether thresholds still meet the needs and concerns of community, whether to consider non-temperature-based thresholds, and what to do in the event that Base Camp and the Road2Home shelters are full and thresholds aren’t met for severe weather operations. Ann acknowledged the need to build capacity within the community in order to meet the need, and asked members to share ideas for how to do that.</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Small Capital Project RFP is open for acquisition, construction, or rehabilitation of affordable housing.</li> <li>• The Point in Time Count, a count of people experiencing homelessness on a single night is scheduled for January 25<sup>th</sup>.</li> <li>• One of the strategies in the Healthy Children’s Fund Implementation Plan is aimed at supporting families with children ages 0-5 that are experiencing housing instability, but are not homeless. An RFP is being developed and awards are expected sometime in the spring.</li> </ul>
8. Executive’s Office Update	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Along with Skagit County, and representatives from Whatcom and Skagit Counties, the Executive’s Office is actively working on a legislative fix to allow Economic Development Investment Funds to be used for affordable housing more directly.</li> <li>• The Executive’s Office is interested building out a predevelopment program similar to the City of Bellingham to support smaller capital projects in getting off the ground. Kayla asked for small providers and nonprofits who are interested in developing small housing projects to reach out with ideas.</li> </ul>
9. City of Bellingham (COB) update	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Samya thanked Road2Home and Opportunity Council for their work around the winter shelter and shower truck.</li> <li>• The City and Whatcom Community Foundation worked with a consultant to produce a capacity building report with recommendations. The City is providing up to \$9,750 to each of the small agencies that participated in the study for capacity building activities.</li> <li>• Samya noted that many of the County’s funding sources outlined in the budget overview are countywide sources that include contributions from City of Bellingham tax payers, bringing awareness to the disproportionality when costs are split 50/50 with County.</li> <li>• A Notice of Funding Availability for capital projects has been released and will be open until the middle of February.</li> <li>• Dean - Kulshan Community Land Trust was a recipient of the capacity building grant and that it went a long way.</li> <li>• Kayla offered some context in response to relatively low general fund amounts set aside for housing and homeless services.</li> </ul>
10. Whatcom Homeless Service Center (WHSC) update	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In addition to partnering with the County on the Point in Time Count, outreach has temporarily expanded to provide showers in partnership with the City of Bellingham.</li> <li>• The Homeless Persons Memorial will take place on the steps of Bellingham City Hall on December 21<sup>st</sup> at 5:30.</li> </ul>
11. New Business	<p>Dan is putting together a letter addressed to City Council that outlines the potential unintended consequences that increasing the canopy cover from 40% to 45% may have on affordable housing development, and welcomes input.</p> <p>Ann introduced Michaela Mandala and Louise Trapp, new County staff members.</p> <p>Von spoke about the last Coalition to End Homelessness meeting, where there was discussion with Tribal representatives around engagement and collaboration with non-Tribal partners, also about a recent experience asking schools to participate in the City’s local planning process.</p>
12. Public Comment	<p>There was no public comment.</p>



Adjourn	The meeting was adjourned.
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**Next Meeting:** Thursday, February 8, 2023, 8:30-10:00am

DRAFT





**Whatcom County Housing Advisory Committee  
Discussion Form**

2/8/2024

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**AGENDA ITEM #:** 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update – Housing Chapter

**PRESENTER:** Lucas Clark, Planning and Development Services

**BOARD ACTION:**  Action Item       Discussion       FYI - Only

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***SIGNIFICANT POINTS OR EXECUTIVE SUMMARY***

The Growth Management Act (GMA) requires Whatcom County to update our Comprehensive Plan by June 30, 2025. County Planning and Development Services has started the process for updating the plan, which includes bringing relevant Comp Plan provisions to advisory groups for review. A memo from Executive Sidhu requests that advisory groups focus on two priorities:

- GMA compliance
- Council priorities

The committee will review the existing version of the housing chapter and make general recommendations, in the form of a memo, on how to meet the GMA requirements and Council priorities.

***BOARD ROLE / ACTION REQUESTED***

- Receive and consider public comment
- Make general recommendations, in the form of a memo, on priorities

***ATTACHMENT(S)***

Memo re comp plan to advisory committees 112823

Resolution 2022-036 (Comp Plan Priorities)



WHATCOM COUNTY  
**HEALTH AND  
COMMUNITY  
SERVICES**





*Satpal Singh Sidhu*  
*Whatcom County Executive*



To: Advisory Committees  
From: Satpal Singh Sidhu, County Executive  
Date: November 28, 2023  
Subject: 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update

The Growth Management Act (GMA) requires Whatcom County to update our Comprehensive Plan by June 30, 2025. Whatcom County has various advisory committees that provide both technical expertise and citizen perspectives on important issues. I value the work and recommendations from these committees.

Updating the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan will be a large, complex, and important effort. We have two priorities for the update:

1. *GMA Compliance* – The GMA is a state law and we must ensure our Comprehensive Plan meets the requirements of this law. This is necessary to address the critical issues of our day. It is also needed to ensure Whatcom County continues to be eligible to receive grant funding from the State.
2. *Council Priorities* – The Whatcom County Council approved [Resolution 2022-036](#) (also attached to this email) in August 2022 setting priorities for the update. Some of these priorities overlap with GMA requirements, but some are unique to our update.

County Planning and Development Services staff will identify Comprehensive Plan topics or chapters that each advisory committee will review. The process will proceed as follows:

- December 2023, SCJ Alliance (the consultant for the project) will contact and meet with committee chairs and lead staff to discuss the Comp Plan update.
- January – February, staff will bring relevant Comp Plan provisions to the advisory committees for review. The committees will review the applicable Comp Plan provisions and make general recommendations on how to meet the GMA requirements and Council priorities.
- February – June 2024, the County’s consultant will develop preliminary draft wording changes to the various Comp Plan chapters to address GMA compliance and Council priorities, with consideration of the advisory committee’s general recommendations.
- July 2024 – October 2024, the advisory committees will review the consultant’s wording changes and make recommendations on these changes.

Public participation is an important component of the GMA. Therefore, I am requesting that each advisory committee set aside time at your meetings to receive and consider public comment. Additionally, because of the state deadline for GMA compliance, I am asking each committee to focus on the two priorities set forth above: GMA compliance and Council priorities. There may be other issues that come up in your discussions, but we need to be focused on the large and important tasks at hand. Each committee can create a list of other issues that may be considered after the 2025 Comp Plan update process is completed.

Thank you for the time, effort, local knowledge, and expertise that you provide! Your work makes Whatcom County a better place. We look forward to engaging with you on the Comp Plan update process. Staff will reach out to you soon to start the review process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Satpal Singh Sidhu". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Satpal Singh Sidhu  
County Executive



# Whatcom County

COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
311 Grand Avenue, Ste #105  
Bellingham, WA 98225-4038  
(360) 778-5010

## Agenda Bill Master Report

File Number: AB2022-422

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<b>File ID:</b>	AB2022-422	<b>Version:</b>	1	<b>Status:</b>	Substitute Approved
<b>File Created:</b>	07/20/2022	<b>Entered by:</b>			
<b>Department:</b>		<b>File Type:</b>	Resolution		
<b>Assigned to:</b>	Council Committee of the Whole	<b>Final Action:</b>	08/09/2022		
<b>Agenda Date:</b>	08/09/2022	<b>Enactment #:</b>	RES 2022-036		

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Primary Contact Email: DBrown@co.whatcom.wa.us

### TITLE FOR AGENDA ITEM:

Resolution establishing priorities for Whatcom County’s 2025 Comprehensive Plan update

### SUMMARY STATEMENT OR LEGAL NOTICE LANGUAGE:

See memo.

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### HISTORY OF LEGISLATIVE FILE

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<b>Date:</b>	<b>Acting Body:</b>	<b>Action:</b>	<b>Sent To:</b>
07/26/2022	Council Committee of the Whole	DISCUSSED	
07/26/2022	Council	HELD IN COMMITTEE	Council (Special)
	Aye: 5	Buchanan, Donovan, Elenbaas, Galloway, and Kershner	
	Nay: 1	Frazey	
	Absent: 1	Byrd	
08/02/2022	Council (Special)	DISCUSSED	
08/09/2022	Council Committee of the Whole	FORWARDED TO COUNCIL WITHOUT A RECOMMENDATION WITH PROPOSED AMENDMENT(S)	
	Aye: 4	Buchanan, Byrd, Donovan, and Elenbaas	
	Nay: 1	Frazey	
	Absent: 0		
	Abstain: 1	Galloway	
	Temp Absent: 1	Kershner	

08/09/2022 Council

SUBSTITUTE APPROVED

Aye: 5 Frazey, Galloway, Kershner, Buchanan, and Donovan  
Nay: 2 Elenbaas, and Byrd  
Absent: 0

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**Attachments:** Staff Memo, Substitute Resolution (Version 4 - Clean), Substitute Resolution (Version 4 - Track Changes), Substitute Resolution (Version 5 - Track Changes), Substitute Resolution (Version 6 - Clean for 8.9.2022), Substitute Resolution (Version 6 - Track Changes for 8.9.2022), Substitute Resolution (Version 7 - Track Changes Following 8.9 COTW)

RESOLUTION NO. 2022-036

ESTABLISHING PRIORITIES FOR WHATCOM COUNTY'S 2025 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

WHEREAS, the Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA) requires Whatcom County to develop a Comprehensive Plan for managing population growth and development, which was adopted in May of 1997; and

WHEREAS, the GMA requires Whatcom County to review urban growth areas (UGAs) under RCW 36.70A.130(3) to be able to accommodate population and employment growth projected for the 20-year planning period; and

WHEREAS, the GMA requires Whatcom County to periodically review and revise its Comprehensive Plan and development regulations under RCW 36.70A.130(1); and

WHEREAS, on August 9, 2016, Whatcom County adopted Ordinance 2016-034 updating the Comprehensive Plan; and

WHEREAS, Whatcom County should conduct an evaluation of the current Comprehensive Plan outlining progress made towards achieving goals and policies, and identify remaining areas of opportunity for improvement; and

WHEREAS, the GMA requires Whatcom County to review, and if needed, revise its Comprehensive Plan and development regulations on or before June 30, 2025, and every ten years thereafter; and

WHEREAS, the current Comprehensive Plan contains chapters on many intersectional issues impacted by climate change, equity, and economic security including Land Use, Housing, Capital Facilities, Utilities, Transportation, Economics, Resource Lands, Recreation, and Environment; and

WHEREAS, on November 9, 2021, the Whatcom County Council passed Resolution 2021-049, adopting the 2021 Whatcom County Climate Action Plan, which develops goals, strategies, and actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and build climate resilience related to buildings, energy, industry, transportation, waste, land use, water, fisheries, agriculture, forestry, and ecosystems; and

WHEREAS, Whatcom County has experienced increasingly severe and frequent effects of climate change including wildfires, smoke, heat dome, drought, and floods; and

WHEREAS, recent scientific reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change point out that time is running short for communities everywhere to mitigate and adapt to the worst effects of climate change; and

WHEREAS, the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan needs to more clearly integrate climate change, equity, and economic security throughout; and

WHEREAS, over the last several years, the Washington State Legislature considered several bills that address GMA and comprehensive planning including, but not limited to, HB 1099 (2021-22) and HB 1117 (2021-22); and

WHEREAS, legislation failing to pass during previous legislative sessions does not preclude Whatcom County from proactively and voluntarily incorporating these policy frameworks into the updated Comprehensive Plan; and

WHEREAS, in addition to climate change, Whatcom County has experienced significant socio-economic impacts due to the COVID-19 pandemic; and

WHEREAS, as early as 2019, the lack of affordable housing is recognized as an impediment to economic growth within Whatcom County by many in the community including the Business and Commerce Advisory Committee; and

WHEREAS, housing affordability continues to decline under unprecedented levels of national inflation; and

WHEREAS, historic growth trends may not accurately predict future needs and new methodologies may need to be introduced; and

WHEREAS, cities within Whatcom County have expressed concern that the traditional use of Urban Growth Areas (UGAs), and their associated restrictions, may incentivize development within unincorporated Whatcom County rather than targeted growth areas; and

WHEREAS, preservation of the Whatcom County's farmlands and agricultural industries is a common goal; and

WHEREAS, public input is a critical component to identifying priorities of the Comprehensive Plan; and

WHEREAS, The Whatcom County Council believes the updated Comprehensive Plan should reflect our shared values and address the current and future needs of Whatcom County; and

WHEREAS, the Whatcom County Council acknowledges that Whatcom County is a diverse landscape, home to a broad spectrum of cultures, and serving a wide variety of industries, and therefore recognizes that the solutions to the priorities identified here may take various forms throughout the County; and

WHEREAS, The Whatcom County Council looks forward to working collaboratively with the Executive, county staff, relevant Whatcom County boards, commissions, and advisory committees, seven cities, Native Nations, and stakeholders to adopt an updated Comprehensive Plan;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Whatcom County Council that the following priorities be considered for incorporation into the updated Comprehensive Plan due on or before June 30, 2025:

1. Equity, environmental justice, and economic security should be guiding principles throughout all chapters of the Comprehensive Plan and associated planning and regulatory documents.
2. Engage government-to-government with Lummi Nation and Nooksack Indian Tribe in the development and implementation of the Comprehensive Plan, and work to ensure tribal treaty rights and sovereignty are considered and upheld in all aspects.

3. Incorporate climate change mitigation, adaptation, resilience, and greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction throughout the Comprehensive Plan.
4. Promote the protection and restoration of healthy habitats for fish and wildlife throughout the Comprehensive Plan.
5. Collaboratively work towards economic security and affordable housing without sacrificing environmental health and public safety.
6. Support a thriving local agriculture and food system economy and food security, considering the impacts of climate change on agriculture as well as equity and housing needs of farmworkers.
7. Build resilience to climate change in forests that enables both a thriving timber economy and healthy sustainable forest ecosystems for wildlife, carbon sequestration and storage, production and storage of cool, clean water, and environmentally safe recreation.
8. More thoroughly consider impacts of climate change, equity, and economic security in relation to natural hazards mitigation and emergency response.
9. More thoroughly consider how growth patterns may have been altered from historic patterns in light of socioeconomic changes, climate change, and housing affordability challenges and what impact this should have on future planning.
10. Analyze the use of, and restrictions to, municipal Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) within the County to avoid unintended incentives to build outside of UGAs.
11. Maximize the environmental benefits of wetland mitigation and consider opportunities to increase development yield in urban areas by establishing off-site wetland mitigations with rigorous monitoring and adaptive management requirements in areas outside of cities.
12. Consider equitable contribution from development within unincorporated Whatcom County toward public and park infrastructure with the implementation of an impact fee program.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, by the Whatcom County Council that the attached Exhibit A be considered as possible implementation strategies and actions that could help accomplish the priorities listed in this resolution.

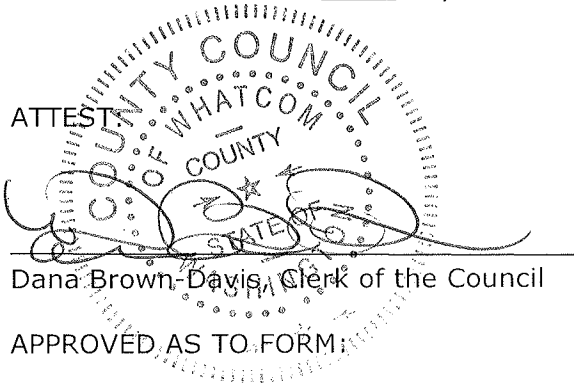
BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the Whatcom County Council recognizes the importance of coordinating and collaborating throughout the planning process with the following governments and stakeholders:

- Whatcom County departments including the Planning & Development Services, Public Works, Parks & Recreation, Health Department, Finance Department, and the Emergency Management Division of the Sheriff's Office.
- Whatcom County boards, commissions, and advisory committees including, but not limited to, the Planning Commission, Climate Impact Advisory Committee, Flood Advisory Committee, Marine Resources Committee, Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee, Racial Equity Commission, Forest Advisory Committee, Agricultural Advisory Committee, Food System Committee, Child and Family Wellbeing Taskforce, Business and Commerce Advisory Committee, Housing Advisory Committee, and WRIA 1 Planning Unit.

- Native Nations including Lummi Nation and the Nooksack Indian Tribe.
- The seven incorporated cities of Whatcom County: Bellingham, Blaine, Ferndale, Lynden, Sumas, Everson, and Nooksack.
- The Port of Bellingham.
- The Public Utility District No. 1 of Whatcom County.
- Whatcom Conservation District.
- State government including local legislators, Governor, the Department of Natural Resources, Department of Ecology, Department of Fish and Wildlife, Department of Agriculture, Department of Commerce, and other relevant agencies.
- Federal government including local Congressional delegation, U.S. Forest Services, U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Interior, National Parks Services, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and other relevant agencies.
- Whatcom County residents, business owners, farmers, farmworkers, community interest groups, and nonprofits.

APPROVED this 9th day of August, 2022.

ATTEST



Dana Brown-Davis, Clerk of the Council

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

/s/ Karen Frakes (via e-mail 8/10/22) / JL  
 Karen Frakes, Civil Deputy Prosecutor

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL  
 WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON

Todd Donovan, Council Chair

**EXHIBIT A:**  
**SUGGESTED IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS**

<p><b>1. Equity, environmental justice, and economic security should be guiding principles throughout all chapters of the Comprehensive Plan and associated planning and regulatory documents.</b></p>
<p>Strengthen the “Diverse Cultural Composition” section of the Land Use chapter to include both equity and sovereignty.</p>
<p>Incorporate relevant components from <u>SB 5141</u> (2021-22) the Healthy Environment for all (HEAL) Act and the <u>Washington Environmental Health Disparities Map</u>.</p>
<p>Incorporate the Whatcom County “Healthy Planning” approach established by <u>resolution 2015-038</u>.</p>
<p>Consult with the Whatcom County Health Department, Racial Equity Commission, Child and Family-Wellbeing Taskforce, and organizations representing farm workers, farmers, low-income families and children, and other groups disproportionately impacted by climate change, environmental injustices, and economic insecurity.</p>
<p>Prioritize actions in overburdened communities that equitably enhance climate resilience and avoid or substantially reduce the adverse impacts of climate change in people, property, and ecological systems using best available science and climate projections.</p>
<p>Consider impacts to economic security and incorporate into relevant chapters.</p>
<p><b>2. Engage government-to-government with Lummi Nation and Nooksack Indian Tribe in the development and implementation of the Comprehensive Plan, and work to ensure tribal treaty rights and sovereignty are considered and upheld in all aspects.</b></p>
<p>Follow the framework established in <u>HB 1717</u> (2021-22), concerning tribal participation in planning under the growth management act.</p>
<p><b>3. Incorporate climate change mitigation, adaptation, resilience, and greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction throughout the Comprehensive Plan.</b></p>

Mitigate and adapt to climate change, reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and build climate resilience by implementing the recommendations of the <a href="#">Whatcom County Climate Action Plan</a> .
Change the title of the Environment chapter to "Environment and Climate Resilience"
Add goals of climate change mitigation and adaptation, and include measures to mitigate the adverse impacts of climate change on people, property, infrastructure, and ecological systems.
Consider and plan for how population growth and development impacts climate projections and associated risks and adverse events, and vice versa.
Add language to encourage a natural climate solutions approach to climate mitigation and resilience.
Use the best available science associated with climate change and biodiversity.
<b>Transportation Chapter</b>
Incorporate measures aimed at reducing transportation related emissions, including adding a goal to reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) by enhancing bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, encouraging the use of public transportation, and improving coordination between development and transportation systems.
Enhance access to safe active and alternative transportation modes by implementing the recommendations of the <a href="#">Whatcom County Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan</a> , the Regional Trails Plan, and Route Map proposed by the Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee.
Accelerate the transition to a low- or zero-emission transportation system (bicycles, cars, trucks, buses, and ferry) and associated infrastructure, per <a href="#">Resolution 2022-033</a> . <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a plan to transition the county fleet, including passenger vehicles, ferry, and other equipment, to electric, hydrogen, biofuels or other low- or zero-emission technologies.</li> </ul>
Identify areas throughout the County, including the small cities, which may be feasible locations for transit-oriented development.

**Capital Facilities Chapter**

Assess and analyze the climate impact of existing County facilities, outline specific actions and secure funding to improve energy efficiency, health, and safety while reducing GHG emissions and harm to people and the environment.

- Identify and replace outdated County facilities, such as the current jail, that become noncompliant with State Building Code standards, and present other health and safety concerns; ensure county facilities are a safe and dignified space for staff and all residents.
- Retrofit County buildings where feasible to increase energy efficiency and install electric heat pumps.
- Increase renewable energy generation and storage in County facilities.

Consider climate change impacts to critical infrastructure and Whatcom County facilities.

Evaluate the climate vulnerability and risk of existing infrastructure in Whatcom County.

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Facilitate the construction of publicly accessible electric vehicle charging infrastructure at County facilities such as buildings, parks, and other community spaces like schools, libraries, and senior centers.

Ease existing barriers by updating relevant development regulations and land use and building codes such as updating parking requirements to require or incentivize parking spots to be EV-ready on all new industrial, commercial, and residential multi-family construction.

Design and build new county facilities in a sustainable way including net zero energy use, increasing energy resilience, utilizing local, sustainably sourced building materials, enhancing microgrid capabilities, and developing at locations that increase accessibility to public and alternative transportation modes.

Conduct an economic analysis for current county infrastructure, buildings, and transportation that factors in externalities of climate change to inform replacement prioritization and timeline.

**Utilities Chapter**

Work with public and private utilities to further reduce greenhouse gas emissions, increase renewable energy resources, and modernize the energy grid to build community and climate resilience.

Support the evaluation of Whatcom Public Utilities District #1 to expand renewable energy production, water, and broadband throughout the County.

Support Universal Broadband Access as a foundation for energy transition and digital equity.

- Establish a goal to achieve symmetrical gigabit broadband throughout the County.
- Support efforts to establish and increase municipal/public broadband.
- Incorporate a coordination, or "Dig Once", policy for all new road construction projects, utility installations, and in planning for new residential, commercial, and industrial development.

Enhance goals to reduce fossil fuel consumption and increase access to renewable energy resources.

- Review, and consider repealing, the moratorium and other restrictions on new wind energy systems, and updating any relevant wind energy code.
- Evaluate potential for geothermal and hydrogen energy in Whatcom County.
- Assess opportunities to modernize the energy grid and other technologies and infrastructure necessary to deploy renewable energy and increase efficiency and energy security.
- Work with privately or investor-owned utilities to support their transition to more renewable energy.
- Incentivize a methodical transition away from natural gas and other fossil fuels while supporting a transition to electrification or other zero-emission alternatives.

Set goals to further improve water quality and quantity.

- Fully implement the outcomes of the Nooksack Adjudication and "Solutions Table" process to ensure legal use of water that supports water use efficiency, salmon recovery, agriculture, and drinking water for all residents.
- Update policies and take action to further protect Lake Whatcom watershed.
- Explore water infrastructure and technology solutions that can help store, conserve, improve efficiency, and alleviate the high demand during times of limited supply.
- Incorporate recommendations and priorities from the Whatcom County Drought Contingency Plan.
- Ensure the Coordinated Water System Plan is consistent with the comprehensive plan and development regulations, confirming current water supply and water systems can support future growth.

Quantify and reduce greenhouse gas emissions from waste management and septic systems in the county.

- Implement the strategies in the Comprehensive Solid and Hazardous Waste Management Plan.

- Promote and incentivize composting (food and yard waste) and the recycling of building materials.

**4. Promote the protection and restoration of healthy habitats for fish and wildlife throughout the Comprehensive Plan**

Add a salmon recovery goal.

Implement the actions outlined in the Water Resource Inventory Area (WRIA) 1 Salmon Recovery Program and Salmonid Recovery Plan.

Incorporate recommendations and priorities from the WRIA 1 Watershed Management Plan.

Identify and update regulations that protect wildlife corridors and habitat connectivity, protect, preserve, and restore healthy habitat and biodiversity, and protect fish and wildlife populations from human activities and structures.

- Identify and map wildlife corridors and connectivity throughout the county.
- Evaluate what lands are best for wildlife corridors and habitat restoration based on a cost-benefit analysis.
- Develop and expand voluntary programs that work with and compensates participating landowners.

**Land Use Chapter**

Work with the State to evaluate a framework and strategy for achieving net ecological gain of salmon and other aquatic species habitat for all public projects and a voluntary incentive driven framework and strategy for private projects.

Coordinate land use policy with water supply goals.

**Transportation Chapter**

Include an updated culvert inventory and prioritized list and proposed schedule for the elimination of identified fish passage barriers in coordination with the Tribes, State, Cities, and private landowners.

**5. Collaboratively work towards economic security and affordable housing without sacrificing environmental health and public safety.**

**Housing Chapter**

Outline specific goals and policies to ensure housing development meets current and future housing, equity, climate, and economic needs.
<p>Ensure adequate housing and services for seniors and people with disabilities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Services to include housing support, assistance with daily living, transportation, recreation, accessing healthcare and assistance at a person-centered level.</li> <li>• Comprehensive Plan must include zoning allowances for residences, compliance with ADA, and transportation component appropriate to this population.</li> </ul>
Add a goal that everyone, at every income level, has access to affordable housing, as defined by a household spending 30% or less of its income on housing costs.
Provide permanently affordable housing and home ownership opportunities in all neighborhoods for individuals earning between 50% to 120% of AMI.
Provide a full range of affordable housing types ranging from multifamily apartments, condos, and duplexes to detached single family homes, ADU's, and tiny homes.
Target an average rental vacancy of 5%, and available housing supply of 4-6 months, for all income levels.
Update, strengthen, and streamline land use codes, housing regulations, and permitting processes that further encourage, and where appropriate, require more affordable, dense, sustainable, low impact, and energy efficient development.
<p>Support building and energy codes that incentivize a strategic transition to all-electric new residential construction, ensuring that our communities are sustainable, affordable, equitable, and healthy now and in the future, while addressing resiliency and vulnerabilities to climate change disproportionately impacting rural and low-income communities in Whatcom County. To help facilitate a strategic transition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• recognize and assist residents still dependent upon access to wood, natural gas, diesel, and other fossils fuels for backup energy when homes have limited, or no access, caused by such things as power outages, severe weather, or location.</li> <li>• prepare for emergencies and build community resilience and self-sufficiency by working with our state and federal partners on energy grid modernization, investing in underground utilities, and access to affordable and reliable electricity for all communities.</li> </ul>

Support incentive programs that promote solar panels, electric heat pumps for space and water heating, and weatherization for existing residential and commercial buildings.
Consider permitting and land use policies that increase affordable housing such as sustainable development incentives, expedited permitting and fee reductions, form-based building codes, transit-oriented development, infill development, density bonuses, clustering subdivisions, urban villages, and farmland trusts.
.
Consider County acquisition of land for permanently affordable housing development such as a community land trust or land bank model.
Expand availability and development of housing, especially mixed and middle housing options, near transit and employment opportunities to reduce travel needs and vehicle miles travelled.
Invest in wetland mitigation throughout Whatcom County and explore off-site wetland mitigation as a strategy to increase development capacity.
In development regulations, protect critical areas by strengthening mitigation requirements including requiring net gain in pervious surface area and tree canopy cover.
<b>Economic Chapter</b>
Promote a more diverse, equitable, sustainable, and climate resilient future economy.
Support living wage job creation in green industry, commerce, forestry, and agriculture.
Support a just clean energy transition for workers and communities.
Invest in robust economic and workforce development at all levels, including in climate-resilient and green energy related fields.
Support supply chain resiliency.
Increase access to quality and affordable childcare by implementing the recommendations of the <a href="#">Whatcom County Child and</a>

Family Well-Being Action Plan.
Work with the Port of Bellingham and Whatcom PUD to increase access to quality and affordable high-speed broadband.
As Whatcom County continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, assess the impact the Comprehensive Plan had/has on supporting the local economy, business models (such as streets turned into outdoor dining for restaurants to reopen), the working population, the basic necessities and logistics for our community, and incorporating lessons learned.
<b>6. Support a thriving local agriculture and food system economy and food security, considering the impacts of climate change on agriculture as well as equity and housing needs of farmworkers.</b>
<b>Resource Lands Chapter</b>
Consider the impacts of climate change, water resources, and flood control on agriculture and agricultural workers such as rising temperatures, more severe and unpredictable weather events, flooding, air quality, water quality and quantity, and soil health.
Work to provide secure and legal access to water for farmers <b>all farmers with an end goal of water use efficiency to drive profitability for a diverse agriculture economy, recognizing that the “use it or lose it doctrine” of water rights does not promote water use efficiency.</b> <del>employing water conservation and water use efficiency principles.</del>
Integrate water supply planning and land use planning to support Whatcom County’s goal of maintaining a minimum of 100,000 acres of agricultural land.
Promote opportunities to increase sustainability and climate resilience in agriculture and processing.
Enhance local food security and food sovereignty by implementing the recommendations of the <a href="#">Whatcom Community Food Assessment</a> .
Improve wages, housing, and working conditions for food chain workers.
Ensure safe and affordable on-farm housing, transportation, and healthcare for farmers and farmworkers.
Increase demand for local food products and expand support networks for local agriculture product development.

- Increase capacity for local food producers to connect with local food enthusiasts by allowing processing and packaging infrastructure on-farm and elsewhere, in the size, scale, use and intensity of agriculture in Whatcom County.

Encourage research and development of drought- and heat- tolerant crops, and agriculture technologies that will reduce emissions, improve soil health, and increase efficient use of water.

Enhance flood control and drainage vitally important to protecting people, farm families, and infrastructure.

- If agriculture land is utilized for “overflow areas”, the county should also plan to facilitate drainage to enable the ability of the land to be productively farmed.
- Manage drainage areas, including wildlife control, to protect land intended to produce food and fiber, except where they have been placed in the conservation programs.

Encourage climate smart farming practices that protect and regenerate soil, water, land, and carbon sequestration.

Preserve productive agricultural lands across Whatcom County by implementing the recommendations of the Whatcom County Agricultural Strategic Plan and the 2019 Rural Land Study, considering rezoning opportunities (such as R5 to Ag 20 or similar), and increasing funding and staff capacity for the Conservation Easement Program in order to protect more agricultural lands from development pressure.

Expand allowable agricultural land uses to include non-traditional farming models.

**7. Build resilience to climate change in forests that enables both a thriving timber economy and healthy sustainable forest ecosystems for wildlife, carbon sequestration and storage, production and storage of cool, clean water, and environmentally safe recreation.**

Support a thriving local forest products industry and sustainable local resource economy including living wage jobs.

Encourage and incentivize working forest management practices that enhance ecosystem services such as healthy fish and wildlife habitats, forest and watershed health, clean water, climate resilience, carbon sequestration and storage, open green space, and sustainability.

- Develop Forest Management Plans for Lake Whatcom Park, Canyon Lake Community Forest, and Stewart Mountain

Community Forest with these values in mind.
Encourage research and development and the use of best available science in the evaluation and mitigation of potential adverse impacts from timber harvesting to peak flows, low summer stream flows, water quality, wildlife, slope stability and wildfire risk.
Engage and collaborate with forest management experts, practitioners, professionals and researchers to obtain well informed and broad understanding of issues in order to facilitate prudent decisions and formulate positions on forestry issues. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Examples include the Cooperative Monitoring, Evaluation, and Research (CMER) Committee (Forest Practices Board), DNR's Olympic Experimental Research Forest scientists and its research partners, and the Whatcom County Forest Advisory Committee.</li> </ul>
Recognize the ability for sustainable forest practices to produce a wide variety of benefits, and identify opportunities to optimize the wood production and carbon storage capacity of forestlands in Whatcom County through the application of extended harvest rotations.
Consider opportunities to protect old and mature forests while also exploring ways to maintain harvestable forest land base, such as actively managing County owned lands and working with the federal government on harvest potential of federal lands.
Provide feedback into Environmental Impact Statements or State Environmental Policy Act on regulatory or policy changes to forest management during planning level analyses in order to influence and encourage climate considerations in decision making while providing certainty to industry and other proponents.
Encourage uneven-aged forest management practices through selective harvest and variable density thinning to enhance structural complexity, biodiversity, drought-tolerance, fire resilience, hydrologic function, and protection of fish-bearing and non-fish-bearing streams.
Expand carbon market opportunities that reward landowners who actively manage their forests to increase carbon storage and sequestration and enhance ecosystem services.
Evaluate the net loss or gain in carbon emissions and ecological function when rezoning forest lands for other uses.
Encourage reforestation, or afforestation, of previously cleared riparian and upland areas through providing funding, seedlings, expertise, and outreach.
Consider development pressures on working lands and work with partners on the possibility of establishing a Whatcom County

goal of maintaining a minimum number of working forest land that is required to sustain local forestry infrastructure.
Work with private landowners to support their investment in the environment and infrastructure, including road improvements, removal of fish passage barriers, and installation of fish-friendly culverts and bridges.
Increase funding and staff capacity for the Conservation Easement Program in order to protect more forest lands from development, particularly as a strategy to protect forest lands in the Lake Whatcom watershed.
Promote development of Whatcom Grown timber products that support climate resilience, the local timber economy, timber and forestry jobs, and reduce transportation-related emissions.
Support the forest industries and workers as they transition to more climate resilient forest harvest techniques, including any support needed to increase wages, benefits, and safety of workplace conditions.
Support environmentally safe recreation on working forests by adequately funding Whatcom County Parks and Recreation to actively manage recreation, mitigate any negative impacts, and develop and maintain existing county owned lands and infrastructure. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborate with all levels of government and other landowners in planning, development, maintenance, and habitat restoration as well as enforcement support.</li> <li>• Provide funding to support other landowners in managing public use impacts in recognition of the benefits forest recreation provides to the county and its residents.</li> </ul>
Determine countywide reforestation opportunities in the built environment and expand and strengthen tree canopy requirements and retention in existing and newly developed areas of all sizes to enhance carbon storage, reduce ambient air temperatures, mitigate urban heat island effect, and lower the future cooling costs of residential and commercial buildings.
<b>8. More thoroughly consider impacts of climate change, equity, and economic security in relation to natural hazards mitigation and emergency response.</b>
Incorporate climate change into the Whatcom County <u>Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan</u> , and synchronize with <u>FEMA hazard mitigation planning</u> best practices and the comprehensive plan.
Incorporate climate change impact assessments and vulnerability and risk assessments to inform future development and preservation efforts.

Consider the impacts of flooding, increasing temperatures, heat domes, droughts, wildfire, and smoke to human health, the environment, natural resources, resource lands, and economic security.

### **Land Use and/or Environment Chapter**

Enhance flood sections to help recover and mitigate against increased intensity and frequency of flood events.

- Conduct a comprehensive review of the systems, plans, policies, and current codes that must be changed or updated to better prepare for the next flood (such as UGA's in floodplains/floodways), and incorporate improvements based on lessons learned.
- Reduce flooding risk by fully supporting the implementation of recommendations and priorities from the most current and ongoing Whatcom County Flood Integrated Plans, including the Lower Nooksack River Comprehensive Flood Hazard Management Plan.
- Factor flood-related displacement of people and property into growth projections and urban growth areas.
- Restore, where possible, the environmental functions of rivers and streams.
- Improve flood plain water storage and infiltration capacities.
- Consider levee setbacks where appropriate.
- Better prepare for floods and consider the disproportionate impacts of flooding on rural and vulnerable communities.
- Support buybacks in designated floodways.
- Consider water storage options that do not include dams.

Build resilience to climate change while reducing flood risks by supporting efforts to increase tree canopy cover (particularly in riparian areas) and reducing impervious surfaces.

Enhance land use planning in the wildland urban interface (WUI) to reduce and mitigate the risk to people and property posed by wildfires.

- Reduce residential development pressure in the wildland urban interface area.
- Create open space buffers between human development and wildfire-prone landscapes.
- Protect existing residential development through community wildfire preparedness and fire adaptation measures.

### **Environment and/or Shoreline Chapter**

More thoroughly incorporate coastal resilience to plan, prepare, build resilience to climate impacts, and reduce vulnerabilities and risks. Ensure consistent language is included in associated codes as well, including the Critical Areas Ordinance, Shoreline Management Program, and relevant sections of Title 20 zoning.

Plan for sea level rise, changing ocean conditions, storm surges, and floods, and its impacts on coastal residential communities, declining marine fisheries, shellfish beds, coastal infrastructure, and recreation areas.
Reduce development in current and projected future shoreline areas.
<b>Capital Facilities Chapter</b>
Consider establishing and maintaining County Resilience Centers during emergencies or disasters. These facilities could: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide controlled temperature shelter as well as food, water, and cots for disasters or power outages.</li> <li>• Prioritize under-served communities more vulnerable to disasters such as floods, wildfires, and prolonged heat/cold spells.</li> </ul>
<b>10. Analyze the use of, and restrictions to, municipal Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) within the County to avoid unintended incentives to build outside of UGAs.</b>
Update policies on UGAs in light of current environmental regulation such as critical areas, shorelines, and stormwater regulations.
Update policies using current best practices for agricultural and protected watersheds.
Consider provisions for flexibility of municipal UGA boundaries to yield greater development densities, fewer environmental impacts, and more affordable housing outcomes.
<b>11. Maximize the environmental benefits of wetland mitigation and consider opportunities to increase development yield in urban areas by establishing off-site wetland mitigation areas outside of cities.</b>
Develop cooperative policies that preserve and grow natural areas outside of cities by allowing off-site mitigation in the County.
Update policies on wetland mitigation to allow lower quality wetlands with little to no habitat value to be mitigated off-site.
Increase capacity to steward and conserve natural resources on private property, including considering a mechanism by which rural, private property owners are able to derive monetary benefit from wetland mitigation initiatives or other environmentally beneficial activities.

## DRAFT List of Council Priorities and WCBCAC Recommendations on Housing Policies

This list combines the Whatcom County Council Priorities in Resolution No. 2022-036 with the Whatcom County Business and Commerce Advisory Committee Proposals to Increase Access to Housing for All Income Levels. Whatcom County Council items are in blue, and WCBCAC in green. Items have been renumbered.

The following items have been deleted from the combined list: duplicates, items that are not controlled by the County (such as condo law reforms), and items that have already been accomplished, such as legalizing ADU's.

1. Outline specific goals and policies to ensure housing development meets current and future housing, equity, climate, and economic needs.
2. Ensure adequate housing and services for seniors and people with disabilities.
  - a. Services to include housing support, assistance with daily living, transportation, recreation, accessing healthcare and assistance at a person - centered level.
  - b. Comprehensive Plan must include zoning allowances for residences, compliance with ADA, and transportation component appropriate to this population.
  - c. Preserve existing mobile home parks.
  - d. Increase the notice period for rent increases to 90 days.
3. Add a goal that everyone, at every income level, has access to affordable housing, as defined by a household spending 30% or less of its income on housing costs.
4. Provide permanently affordable housing and home ownership opportunities in all neighborhoods for individuals earning between 50% to 120% of AMI.
  - a. Increase flexibility for funding and incentives for workforce housing.
5. Provide a full range of affordable housing types ranging from multifamily apartments, condos, and duplexes to detached single family homes, ADU' s, and tiny homes.
6. Target an average rental vacancy of 5%, and available housing supply of 4- 6 months, for all income levels.
7. Update, strengthen, and streamline land use codes, housing regulations, and permitting processes that further encourage, and where appropriate, require more affordable, dense, sustainable, low impact, and energy efficient development.
  - a. Adopt voluntary inclusionary zoning, with incentives for permanently affordable homeownership and rentals.
  - b. Adopt the Multifamily Tax Exemptions of 8, 12, and 20 years.
  - c. Reduce the complexity and the cost of compliance of code.

- d. Schedule informal monthly meetings between planning director, staff, land use consultants, tenants, and for-profit and non-profit developers for feedback in both directions.
  - e. Require phone calls and emails to be returned within two business days.
  - f. Tighten coordination between Public Works and Planning to avoid conflicts and confusion.
8. Support building and energy, codes that incentivize a strategic transition to all-electric new residential construction, ensuring that our communities are sustainable, affordable, equitable, and healthy now and in the future, while addressing resiliency and vulnerabilities to climate change disproportionately impacting rural and low- income communities in Whatcom County. To help facilitate a strategic transition:
- a. Recognize and assist residents still dependent upon access to wood, natural gas, diesel, and other fossils fuels for backup energy when homes have limited, or no access, caused by such things as power outages, severe weather, or location.
  - b. Prepare for emergencies and build community resilience and self-sufficiency by working with our state and federal partners on energy grid modernization, investing in underground utilities, and access to affordable and reliable electricity for all communities.
9. Support incentive programs that promote solar panels, electric heat pumps for space and water heating, and weatherization for existing residential and commercial buildings.
10. Consider permitting and land use policies that increase affordable housing such as sustainable development incentives, expedited permitting and fee reductions, form-based building codes, transit-oriented development, infill development, density bonuses, clustering subdivisions, urban villages, and farmland trusts.
- a. Approve land use permits within 4 months and building permits within 3 months
  - b. Allow building permits to be approved by 3rd party outside sources
  - c. Enact digital permitting for land use and building permits.
  - d. Extend all county land use permit timelines to a minimum of 5 years to align subdivisions, conditional use permits, stormwater permits, development agreements, and wetland permits.
  - e. Extend Critical Area Permits and Consultant reports with the Preliminary Plat or Land Use Permit.
  - f. Expedite permitting for permanently affordable housing (complete permit sets approved within 90 days).
  - g. Create a minimum 7-day notice for a Hearing Examiner date.
  - h. Allow applicants to bond clearing, grading, and stormwater permits before Public Facilities Construction application approval.
  - i. Allow single staircase in multifamily buildings
11. Consider County acquisition of land for permanently affordable housing development such as a community land trust or land bank model.

- a. Use EDI funds as a long term, low interest loan to pay for onsite infrastructure for affordable housing.
  - b. Add an FTE planner to focus on affordable housing in Whatcom County.
- 12. Expand availability and development of housing, especially mixed and middle housing options, near transit and employment opportunities to reduce travel needs and vehicle miles traveled.
  - a. Support the following annexations in the 2026 Comp Plan: South Caitac UGA Reserve, Yew St, and Alderwood.
- 13. Invest in wetland mitigation throughout Whatcom County and explore off-site wetland mitigation as a strategy to increase development capacity.
- 14. In development regulations, protect critical areas by strengthening mitigation requirements including requiring net gain in pervious surface area and tree canopy cover.



## Bi-Monthly Report

January, 2024

*Whatcom County Health and Community Services ~ Equity – Collaboration – Compassion – Transparency – Innovation - Service*

### Division Updates

#### Leadership, provided by Health Director Erika Lautenbach and Health Officers Dr. Amy Harley and Dr. Greg Thompson:

Health Director: The department continues to be focused on our strategic plan priorities: community partnerships and engagement, organizational infrastructure, workforce development, and quality management. There are examples of these priorities in action in the following pages, but I'll share two timely updates.

Within the workforce development priority: HCS received a \$200,000 grant for training, skill development, workforce stabilization, and other activities. We look forward to using these dollars for a learning management software, training and conference opportunities for staff, and training development for both staff and community partners.

I convened a Funder's Roundtable group last year, which includes public and private philanthropy as well as government funders. Collectively, we want to address workforce shortages in housing, behavioral health, and human services fields, and are developing plans to support existing staff while also bolstering recruitment, strengthening relationships with K-12 and higher ed, and supporting non-profit leaders.

Within the organizational infrastructure priority: After several years of regular recruitments for new positions, we are nearly fully staffed. There are few new positions including an Environmental Health Supervisor, a Policy Analyst, and a Healthy Children's Fund specialist yet to recruit in the first quarter of the year. Work continues with the Executive's office to ensure that the organization is prepared for additional growth associated with housing and homelessness, opioids and fentanyl, and behavioral health programs, facilities and staffing associated with the public health and safety ballot measure.

We welcomed a new PHAB Chair and Vice Chair, as well as new members. The PHAB has ambitious plans to develop six sub-groups and begin to fulfill their new state requirements of community advisory boards to health boards.

Health Officers: One of our main roles continues to be providing consultation around exposures or outbreaks of infectious conditions of public health significance and we are always happy to be a resource to WCHCS staff and community providers in this regard. This time of year, a lot of energy goes into maintaining situational awareness of respiratory illnesses in our community. In the fall of 2023, we joined other organizations in our region in an approach of closely monitoring percentages of Emergency Department visits due to COVID-19, Influenza or RSV and defining thresholds indicating high transmission.

To ensure easy access to this indicator of disease transmission for our community, the Health Information Assessment and the Communications teams revamped the [Respiratory Virus Data Dashboard](#). Excitingly, this year brought new tools to fight RSV in the form of a vaccine for older adults and pregnant women and a

preventive antibody for newborns, so it's hopeful that there will be less burden of disease due to RSV in coming years.

Another major body of work for us is contributing to the opioid crisis response by participating in the county MAC Group and through collaborations with community partners, healthcare providers, tribal partners, schools, other health officers, and the Washington State Department of Health. The [data on the impact of opioids in our county](#) are tough and provide ample motivation for our continued efforts to work alongside our internal and external colleagues in eliminating obstacles and applying solutions to all aspects of this complex issue. Our county's focus on increasing supports for families with young children and focus on youth mental health are important parts of upstream prevention and we're also particularly excited to hear the unique perspective of our county's youth at the [All Hands Next Gen Summit](#) in June.

### **Administration:**

The department's Financial Services Manager Kathleen Roy's last day with the department was November 27, 2023. A recruitment for a replacement is underway and after a multi-step process, we hope to have a new manager by mid- to late February.

### **Communicable Disease and Epidemiology (CDE), provided by CDE Manager Shamika Brooks**

In 2023, the CD&E division completed nearly 300 scheduled clinical visits tallied across multiple programs at the Girard location. To maintain our current clinical service offerings, the CDE team will utilize the Division Street location (half of old triage facility next to the work center) for an additional clinic site. The additional space will allow us to accommodate larger families, increase storage capacity, give us access to additional exam rooms, and increase the availability of space for outreach events.

**Immunization program** The team completed the Immunizations Community Health Assessment in the summer of 2023. The health assessment identified that the most common barrier to accessing immunizations is provider office availability. The Immunizations program has been instrumental in partnering with local school districts over the summer to reduce barriers to access to vaccinations for students by hosting clinics at school locations. In 2023, 134 vaccine outreach events were held serving over 500 clients and more than 1,000 vaccines were administered.

**Tuberculosis (TB)** The Public Health Nurses in the TB program have provided services for approximately 138 clients in 2023 which includes clients with Latent TB. This team was essential in collaborating with the Washington State Department of Health to ensure that refugees (largely the Ukrainian population) received adequate assessment and follow up for TB surveillance. The Public Health Nurses provided case management and treatment for 5 active cases of TB, including a case of Multidrug-Resistant Tuberculosis (MDR TB) which required extensive monitoring.

**Syringe Services/Harm Reduction program** Staff and volunteers provided over 5,000 kits of Narcan to the community in 2023. In addition, we have provided approximately 125 SSP/harm reduction clinics and training for community partners. In 2024, we are piloting a program with the Response Systems Division (RSD) in which SSP/harm reduction nurses will accompany the ARNP from RSD and her team weekly to round and offer harm reduction services. Due to the unique challenges of the clients we serve, the SSP/harm reduction nurses are being trained in wound care to assist clients with wound care needs. We

find that our clients have high barriers to accessing care and are often lost to follow up with community partners. In addition, we are adding drug checking services for clients to allow individuals to learn the composition of their substances to reduce the risk of unintended overdoses.

**Communicable Disease (CD)** The team continues to work on response time and case completeness. As COVID-19 work and COVID-19 teams statewide stand down, the CD team can focus more on other projects and tasks. The Infection Prevention team continues to work with healthcare congregate settings with communicable disease surveillance and infection control. The current focus is utilizing SHARP/Strike grant funding to support respiratory protection programs with fit testing services.

**Sexual Health** While Chlamydia and Gonorrhea trended down for 2023, there has been an increase in syphilis cases, more than any previous year on par with national rates. Public Health Nurses continue to test clients and offer treatment to clients with barriers to access to treatment in the community. In 2023, the WCHCS staff conducted 62 Hepatitis C, 131 HIV, and 88 Syphilis point of care tests. In addition, they conducted 19 Syphilis confirmatory tests and 100 Chlamydia/Gonorrhea tests. Many of our clients are unhoused, suffer from substance abuse, and are uninsured or underinsured. Public Health Nurses work with local and state partners to reach unhoused clients and those lost to care.

## **Community and Organizational Development (COD), provided by COD Manager Dr. Lynnette Bennett:**

The Community and Organizational Development division facilitates collaboration across the divisions and provides accurate, meaningful, and timely information, data, and assessment to the community and our partners. We provide centralized services for informatics and data applications, assessment, epidemiology, performance management, evaluation, graphic design, communications strategy, media relations, website management, equity work, hiring and onboarding, and professional development.

**Health Information & Assessment** Staff, along with CDE, developed the new [Respiratory Virus Data Dashboards](#) to provide accurate and relevant data for COVID-19, Influenza, and RSV rates in one location. These dashboards are publicly available and include transmission monitoring, emergency department visits, testing, and long-term care outbreaks for the North Sound region (Whatcom, Skagit, Snohomish, Island, and San Juan counties).

**Workforce Development** Staff have redesigned the onboarding process for new hires. We are also revising and updating our annual HIPAA training, in addition to a new WCHCS HIPAA Guidebook in February.

**Partnerships & Strategy** The team is growing to expand foundational capabilities and services with the addition of a new Equity Specialist, a second Emergency Preparedness and Resiliency position, and a new Policy Analyst. Existing staff in Communications and Emergency Preparedness have been providing support and expertise to the Multi-Agency Coordination group for Opioid Response as well as the Severe Winter Shelter.

## **Community Health & Human Services (CH&HS), Provided by CH&HS Manager Ann Beck:**

**Homeless Housing Program** Whatcom County's severe weather shelter opened in late December and provided back up when Road2Home's seasonal shelter lost power on Christmas Eve. The severe weather shelter was also open for nine continuous nights and five days in mid-January, averaging 55 people per night. In addition to the severe weather shelter, HCS staff provided staffing and support to the City's drop-in center operations. Thanks to the preparation for the severe weather shelter, we currently have a total of 48 trained individuals ready to support operations. There are 14 full time county staff, 11 temporary staff and 23 volunteers ready to jump in for the January openings. We anticipate another 6 individuals finishing their training by the end of the month.

**Community Health Programs** Food and health care access both contribute to stronger communities, and there are projects in the works focused on access in East Whatcom County. Thanks to County Council approval of ARPA funding in late 2023, we're able to remodel the kitchen at the East Whatcom Regional Resource Center. With the planned updates there is potential for this kitchen to provide more food access and options to east county residents.

HCS staff are helping to facilitate the planning and preparation for a school-based health center at the Mt. Baker School District. With a grant from WA State DOH securing initial project funding and a provider willing to offer services, this project could be operational in some form by the end of the year.

**Special Projects** Our Small Capital Projects (RFP) closes on January 9<sup>th</sup>. Using ARPA funds and funds from both HB 1590 and 1406, HCS has \$2.6M in available funds to support acquisition, rehabilitation, and construction of affordable housing. In the future, we plan to release a similar RFP each October. HCS staff continues to work with the Executive's Office and Facilities to plan a new 23hr Crisis facility using funds allocated by the state legislature.

**Developmental Disabilities** The first round of RFPs closed in mid-January, which is designed to solicit projects that would increase inclusion opportunities in the community for those with developmental disabilities. The applications will be reviewed in the coming weeks.

The Developmental Disabilities Board welcomed 3 new members last year and has another on the horizon for 2024.

The Single-Entry Access to Services (SEAS) program has expanded through support of both DD and Community Health staff, to include services such as perinatal mental health services and home visiting.

**Children and Families** Staff are in the process of writing requests for proposals (RFPs) from the community to advance the Healthy Children's Fund goals of supporting early learning and care, and supporting vulnerable children and their families. We anticipate the first RFP to focus on preventing homelessness will be posted in early February.

**Prevention Programs** In 2023, we added staff, using state funding, to our Youth Cannabis and Tobacco Prevention program, and have expanded to a regional level.

Our staff have also been actively involved in the Opioid response in helping to coordinate many of the collaborative conversations happening in the community, including the All Hands Event in 2023.

We contracted with all seven school districts with BH funds to support student mental health and wellbeing and will be releasing an RFP soon for telehealth services to further expand those services.

**Veterans** Our team of (as of 2023) two veteran specialists helped indigent veterans receive about \$100,000 in financial assistance in 2023, which kept many veterans current on rent and utilities, and able to meet the needs of their families. We have also built a partnership with Lummi Nation by signing an MOU to make sure clear paths of access are available for Lummi veterans to meet with staff. Our two veteran specialists also filed just over 1000 claims to the VA on behalf of Whatcom County veterans.

**Nurse Family Partnership (NFP)** In 2023, NFP served 89 families and welcomed the birth of 25 babies. The team completed 750 home visits and 250 telehealth visits, providing support to these first-time parents during this major life change.

The NFP team is also looking forward to another year of successful partnership with Lydia Place and the Bellingham Public Library to offer season family activities to build community connection amongst families.

### **Environmental Health (EH), provided by EH Manager Sue Sullivan:**

Environmental Health (EH) is conducting a Climate Vulnerability Assessment focusing on the public health impacts of wildfire smoke and extreme heat on vulnerable populations. The assessment report and Story Map will be finalized by then end of June.

**Drinking Water** We continue to receive notifications regarding State DOH's monitoring of lead in drinking water in our County's schools. Thus far, only the Bellingham School District has been tested. While there are some sources that are testing above action or remediation levels, most sources are below these levels. The school district is provided guidance on proper communication to communities, action plan requirements and sources of remediation funding.

In 2023, our drinking water specialist supported access to drinking water through approximately 88 well inspections, 74 well seals observed, and completion of 13 sanitary surveys of public water systems serving 742 water connections. These activities support at least 830 individual water connections and subsequent community members.

The team also provided technical assistance to the Whatcom County Parks and Recreation for their Plantation Rifle Range project.

Looking ahead to 2024, we will continue to provide technical expertise to Parks and Recreation for their Plantation Rifle Range project and support DOH in sanitary surveys and well seals. It is also anticipated that our team will receive training related to the upcoming Department of Ecology's adjudication process, forecasting misdirected phone calls to our drinking water team.

**Onsite Sewage** In 2023, the onsite sewage program increased access to sewage disposal for over 300 properties and supported continued access to adequate sewage disposal by tracking over 29,000 onsite sewage systems. In addition, homeowners of 874 residences received training to maintain their onsite sewage system and to contribute to a thriving Whatcom County. Beyond access to sewage sanitation, the Onsite Sewage Team responded to over 300 new community concerns related to improper sewage disposal.

The team created and formalized an onboarding process for newly licensed operations and maintenance specialists, installers, and pumpers in Whatcom County; they developed a new online homeowner training program; and they created an internal continuing education tracking tool for licensed operators. This team

has also supported the Pollution Identification and Control team in addressing surface water quality concerns.

Looking ahead to 2024, we aim to complete program evaluation impacts for newly implemented processes. Currently, 180 licenses have been issued for operation and maintenance specialists, installers, and pumpers to continue supporting onsite sewage and sanitation work in Whatcom County. Our team is also looking forward to Washington state sewage code changes and aim to prepare internally for these changes prior to state adoption. To support transparency of our program, we are solidifying and developing our sewage spill notification process across the county and aim to define our role with partner agencies.

**Planning and Development** Our EH planning and development specialist has interfaced with Whatcom County Planning and Development to ensure health measures are met for diverse projects. Our EH planning and development specialist increased access to safe housing through the review of permits and land development issues.

Looking ahead to 2024, complex projects continue to be pursued that will impact a variety of sectors including available housing, child care, hospitality, restaurants, community hubs, tourism, and industry such as recycling.

**Food and Living Environment** The Living Environment program has applied for an additional \$50,000 grant from the WA Dept of Ecology. The intention is to continue data collection and begin developing a Cyanobacteria management Plan.

Our Wisner Lake data collection work continues and is expected to wrap up in April. We received state grants to assess the harmful algal blooms on the lake to determine what steps could be taken to address.

Rabies exposure assessment work has been busier than usual – an average of two assessments per week in November and December 2023 compared to 0-1 per month in previous years. We aren't clear on why this has been the case but will continue to monitor to try and identify trends.

Our food Safety team collaborated with a local organization called Northwest Fruit Rescue to support production of 280 pounds of applesauce for donation to local food banks.

**Solid Waste** In 2023, the Solid Waste group responded to over 80 solid waste and/or illegal drug contamination complaints, and successfully permitted two new solid waste handling facilities. We hired a Public Health Educator to support solid waste reduction and recycling education and outreach; completed a landfill mapping project to ensure accuracy when determining water availability, and completed of the Comprehensive Solid and Hazardous Waste Management Plan.

Looking ahead to 2024, we aim to increase our waste reduction and recycling education and outreach efforts, amend County Code to allow for single-stream curbside recycling, permitting two new solid waste handling facilities, and installing a new scale house to replace the old and deteriorating one at the Point Roberts transfer station.

**School Health and Safety** In 2023, the School Health and Safety program, which is new in the department, focused on creating the foundational structure for a successful program. Staff created a school health and safety workgroup comprised of representatives from each school district; performed school health and safety assessments, focusing on the highest risk areas including playgrounds and chemistry

labs; implemented a “rehab the Lab” program, allowing schools to properly dispose of old, expired and/or unused chemicals at no cost; and coordinated with the Northwest Clean Air Agency to supply Purple Air monitors at schools around the county to provide more data around air quality and allow for schools to make more informed decisions about when to cancel outdoor events due to poor air quality.

Looking ahead to 2024, we aim to perform school assessments at all county K-12 schools, focusing on Career and Technical Education areas, strengthen our relationships with our school partners, and further solidify our program structure.

## **Response Systems (RS), provided by RS Manager Malora Christensen:**

In 2023, Response Systems division continued to build direct service programs designed to meet critical, unmet needs in our ecosystem of care in Whatcom County.

**Alternative Response Team (ART)** On January 5, 2024, the Alternative Response Team (ART) celebrated the 1 Year Anniversary of responding to 911 calls instead of local law enforcement. The pilot year of ART was a dynamic, community-based engagement process of developing a new program that would work for our system. Currently ART responds to calls Monday-Friday 8 am to 5:30 pm with a full team of five Behavioral Health Specialists. One of the most significant developments of ART was the Community Connector position at WhatComm dispatch. The Community Connector position took 1,008 calls in 2023 with 773 of those calls handles by ART.

**Co-Responder Program** As of January 17, 2024, the Co-Responder program (in partnership with the Whatcom County Sheriff's Office) is fully staffed and operational. This dynamic partnership pairs a Behavioral Health specialist with Behavioral Health deputies to respond to calls for services in our community. We are eager to see how this new program evolves in 2024 to serve the unique needs of Whatcom County residents.

**Mental Health Court** In 2023, Mental Health Court expanded their capacity to serve up to 50 individuals. The Mental Health Court team added a Behavioral Health specialist to make a team of three that work closely with both Bellingham Municipal Court and District Court. With this staffing expansion, Mental Health Court will also be assisting with the coordination of Mental Health Sentencing Alternative (MHSA).

**Ground Level Response and Coordinated Engagement (GRACE)** At the beginning of 2024, GRACE welcomed two new Community Paramedics to the partnership. Steve Larsen with Bellingham Fire and Ryan Pavitt with Ferndale Fire have stepped into this dynamic role and will be partnered with GRACE Intensive Case Managers. We would like to thank both Captain Joe Frank and Tiffene Hanson for their years of service as Community Paramedics!

**Let Everyone Advance with Dignity/Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD)** In 2024, the Whatcom LEAD program continues to operate at capacity with over 130 individuals enrolled and 8 Behavioral Health specialists doing the work of Intensive Case Management and Outreach Coordination.

**Medical Team** Near the end of 2023, we were able to add a Registered Nurse to our Response Systems medical team. This new position works closely with the Response Systems ARNP to serve individuals in our community that are not connected to healthcare. This team of two regularly supports: Gardenview Village, BaseCamp, Francis Place, 22 North, Dorothy Place, City Gate, local encampments, winter and severe weather shelters.

In 2024, the Response Systems division will continue to focus on system improvement efforts that improve the delivery of services within our community. Our team will continue to focus on jail behavioral health and re-entry services, system coordination between emergency systems, our hospital and the Anne Deacon Center for Hope. Development work will be focused on the 23 Hour Crisis Relief Center and pursuing additional opportunities for criminal legal diversion programs.