

SHORELINE MASTER PROGRAM: PERIODIC REVIEW PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN



Introduction

Whatcom County (County) is undertaking a periodic review of its Shoreline Master Program (SMP), as required by the Washington State Shoreline Management Act, RCW 90.58.080(4). The Shoreline Management Act requires each SMP be reviewed, and revised if needed, on an eight-year schedule established by the state Legislature. The review ensures the SMP stays current with changes in laws and rules, remains consistent with other County plans and regulations, and is responsive to changed circumstances, new information and improved data. This periodic update is not required to: re-evaluate the ecological baseline that was established as part of the 2007 comprehensive update; extensively assess no net loss criteria other than to ensure that proposed amendments do not result in degradation of the baseline condition; or change shoreline jurisdiction or environment designations, unless deemed appropriate and necessary by the County.

The purpose of this Public Participation Plan is to describe how the County will encourage early and continuous public input throughout the SMP periodic review process, including the steps that the County will take to provide opportunities for public engagement and public comment, as well as contact information and web addresses.

This plan is a working document and will be adjusted as needed to provide for the greatest and broadest public participation over the course of the periodic review process.

1.0 Public Participation Goals

- Provide interested parties with timely information, an understanding of the process, and multiple opportunities to review and comment on proposed amendments to the SMP.
- Actively solicit information from citizens, property owners and stakeholders about their concerns, questions and priorities for the periodic review process.
- Encourage interested parties to informally review and comment on proposed changes to the SMP throughout the process and provide those comments to decision makers.
- Provide forums for formal public input at project milestones prior to decision-making by local officials.
- Consult and consider recommendations from neighboring jurisdictions, federal and state agencies, and Native American tribes.

2.0 Public Participation Opportunities

The County is committed to providing multiple opportunities for public participation throughout the process and will use a variety of communication tools to inform the public and encourage participation, including the following:

2.1 Website

The County's website will feature information about the periodic review on its SMP webpage. This webpage can be found at: <https://www.whatcomcounty.us/3097/Shoreline-Master-Program-Periodic-Update>. The webpage will be the primary repository of all information related to the periodic review, including draft documents, notices, a Frequently Asked Questions section, and other project information. The page will provide staff contact information, as well as an email link for questions and comments.

2.2 News Media

The official paper of record, the Bellingham Herald, will be kept up to date on the periodic review process and receive copies of all official notices for publication. Copies will also be provided to the Lynden Tribune, the Northern Light, and the Point Roberts All Point Bulletin. Other internet sources such as [WhatcomTalk](#) and social media will also be considered for notification, if deemed appropriate.

2.3 Noticing

The public will be notified of the process and meetings via a combination of website, email, and newspaper announcements. Newspaper announcements/advertising pursuant to Section 2.2 will point community members to the County's SMP website where they can learn about the update process and subscribe to the "Shoreline Master Program Update 2020" under the County's "Notify Me" system. This system will be used to notify interested parties regarding periodic review progress and participation opportunities. In addition to the "Shoreline Master Program Update 2020" list, County staff will also broadcast to the "Planning & Development Services – Notifications." Those people subscribed to the "Planning Commission" and "County Council" lists will also receive those agendas.

2.4 Public Open Houses

The County will hold several public open houses at two times during the SMP update process.

The first set of open houses will be held to inform the community about the update process and to hear any initial concerns for the purpose of developing the scope of the project. The County anticipates holding up to three of these open houses in various locations throughout the County. Suggested locations for these meetings include Birch Bay, Everson, and Lake Whatcom. The current target date for these meetings is near the end of June, 2019. "Save the date" notices will be sent out in May, 2019, via email. In addition, newspaper notices of the open houses will be posted. The County Planning Commission will be asked to participate in at least one of these open house events.

Later in the periodic update process, another round of up to three open houses will be held to update the community on the process, share work products, and get feedback after draft SMP amendments have been prepared. Locations and timing for these meetings will be determined at a later date.

Public comments received during all open houses will be posted on the County's SMP webpage and used in the scoping and review process.

2.5 Scoping

The scope of the update will be based on public comments received through the scoping process (including the first set of open houses) and staff-identified issues. We will then take the issues identified to the Planning Commission and Council, provide them an opportunity to add any issues they may have or delete any issues they deem not appropriate, and then request a resolution "setting" the scope for the update. Items raised after this may not be considered, as there is a limited budget and time allotted to this project. This means that proposals for amendments will need to be identified prior to the scope being set by Council. This does not preclude other proposed amendments being considered in the future. Amendments can be proposed at any time through the docketing process. Scoping is just a filtering process to identify priority issues to be addressed in the limited time and budget available for this SMP update cycle.

2.6 Public Comment Periods and Hearings

The Planning Commission will be the primary forum for detailed review and recommendations to the County Council. The Planning Commission will hold a public hearing to solicit input on the periodic review. Prior to the hearing, the Planning Commission will hold at least one meeting to discuss the periodic review and proposed SMP amendments. Planning Commission meetings are open to the public.

The Whatcom County Council also will hold at least one hearing to take public comments before final adoption.

The County plans to take advantage of the optional joint-review process for SMP amendments, which allows for a joint state-local comment period and public hearing (WAC 173-26-104). County staff will coordinate with the Washington State Department of Ecology on public notification of the comment period and hearing(s).

Public notice of all hearings will state who is holding the comment period and/or hearing, the date and time, and the location of any public hearing. Notices will be published per official policy and comply with all other legal requirements, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act. A notice will be sent to the email list (2.3, above) and the Washington State Department of Ecology.

2.7 Ongoing Comment

All documents under consideration will be available on the periodic review webpage and at the County's Planning and Development Services office, 5280 Northwest Drive, Bellingham, WA 98226. Interested parties are encouraged to provide comments by letter or email (to the address provided in section 2.8). All comments will be compiled and provided to the Planning Commission and County Council.

2.8 Primary Staff Contact

Interested parties can learn about the process and where to find information, and submit comments, by contacting the Project Manager for this project:

Cliff Strong, Senior Planner
5280 Northwest Drive
Bellingham, WA 98226
(360)778-5942
cstrong@co.whatcom.wa.us.

3.0 Stakeholder Coordination

Whatcom County will invite the participation of the following stakeholders in the review process:

- City of Bellingham
- City of Everson
- City of Ferndale
- City of Lynden
- City of Nooksack
- City of Blaine
- City of Sumas
- Whatcom County Parks & Recreation Department
- Whatcom County Public Works Department
- Lummi Nation
- Nooksack Tribe
- Port of Bellingham
- Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation
- Washington State Department of Ecology
- Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Washington State Department of Natural Resources
- US Army Corps of Engineers
- Bellingham Regional Chamber of Commerce
- Building Industry Association of Whatcom County
- Whatcom Conservation District
- Public Utility District No. 1 of Whatcom County
- Birch Bay Watershed & Aquatic Resources Management District (BBWARM)
- Marine Resources Committee
- Drainage Districts and Subzones
- Re-Sources
- BP Refinery & other Cherry Point industries
- Whatcom Business Alliance
- Western States Petroleum Association

The County will engage directly with the tribes and local cities to solicit input. Internal discussions are planned with County staff from other departments – especially Public Works and Parks. All other agencies and local organizations will be expected to participate in open houses unless otherwise requested.

4.0 Timeline

The following is a general timeline including anticipated public participation opportunities.

May 2019	Email and newspaper notifications of process and upcoming open houses Project website established
June 2019	Open houses (up to 3) to inform the community and gather input
January 2020	Open houses (up to 3) to share proposed updates and gather input
February-June 2020	Environmental review (SEPA) Public comment period Joint Planning Commission/Ecology public hearing & review County Council Public Hearing & review Ecology review County Council review and final action