



Comprehensive Plan Amendments

H A N D O U T I

What is the Comprehensive Plan?

The Comprehensive Plan guides the physical development of the County including the location and intensity of housing, businesses, home occupations, industry and open space. The Comprehensive Plan designates different areas of the County for urban development, agriculture, forestry, and rural land uses. It also contains policies relating to capital facilities, utilities, transportation, economics, recreation, and the environment.

What are the procedures for amending the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan and Zoning?

The state Growth Management Act and the Whatcom County Code require that all Comprehensive Plan amendments, along with related changes to zoning, be considered together as a package once every year (with certain exceptions). The amendment process is outlined in Chapter 20.10 of the Whatcom County Zoning Ordinance:

- The person requesting an amendment completes an application form and environmental checklist. Application forms can be obtained from Whatcom County Planning & Development Services (PDS) - Planning Division or on the County website: http://www.co.whatcom.wa.us/pds/planning/comp_plan/amendments.jsp
- The person requesting the Comprehensive Plan amendment, along with any related zoning amendments, must submit the completed application form and environmental checklist to PDS by December 31. Note: Requests for Zoning changes that *do not* require a Comprehensive Plan amendment are processed on a different schedule. (See Handout II)
- In February or March, the County Council votes on which amendments will be “initiated” for further review (amendments proposed by the County Executive and Cities are automatically initiated). If an amendment is initiated, it means that it will receive further consideration. It does not necessarily mean that the amendment will be approved. Proposed Comprehensive Plan amendments that are not initiated by the County Council do not receive further consideration.
- The person applying for an amendment must pay the associated fees within 15 days of County Council signing the resolution initiating the amendment or the application becomes null and void (unless the County Council has waived the fees). Please refer to the current Whatcom County Fee Schedule for the current fees. Amendment fees may include:

THE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES HANDOUT SERIES

Whatcom County Planning & Development Services
5280 Northwest Drive, Bellingham, WA 98226
Phone (360) 676-6907 ▪ Fax (360) 738-2493 ▪ Inspections (360) 738-2520

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- Comprehensive Plan map amendment and associated rezone
 - Text amendment
 - Environmental checklist
- The Planning Division evaluates the proposed amendment(s) and issues a staff report.
 - The Planning Commission conducts public hearings on the proposed amendments in the spring and summer. The Commission's recommendations are sent to the County Council on or about September 1.
 - The County Council votes on which amendments will be approved and which will be denied on or about November 30. The County Council, if they choose, may hold a public hearing before making a decision.

What determines County approval?

The amendment must meet all of the following criteria:

- A. The amendment conforms to the requirements of the Growth Management Act (GMA), is internally consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, is consistent with county-wide planning policies, and is consistent with any interlocal planning agreements.
- B. Further studies made or accepted by the PDS department and Planning Commission indicate a need for the amendment, or changed conditions demonstrate a need for the amendment.
- C. The public interest will be served by approving the amendment. In determining

whether the public interest will be served, factors including, but not limited to, the following shall be considered:

1. The anticipated effect upon the rate or distribution of population growth, employment growth, development, and conversion of land as envisioned in the Comprehensive Plan.
 2. The anticipated effect upon the ability of the County and/or other service providers, such as cities, schools, water and/or sewer purveyors, fire districts, and others as applicable, to provide adequate services and public facilities including transportation facilities.
 3. The suitability of the site to provide on-site wells and/or on-site sewage disposal, if applicable.
 4. Anticipated impact upon critical areas.
 5. Anticipated impact upon designated agricultural, forest and mineral resource lands.
- D. The amendment does not include nor facilitate illegal spot zoning.

Information

Due to the administrative complexity of this process, it is best to talk with a Planner to answer any additional questions.

Planning and Development Services
 5280 Northwest Drive
 Bellingham, Washington 98226
 E-mail: pds@co.whatcom.wa.us
 Staff Contact: Planner
 Phone: (360) 676-6907