



PROCEDURES FOR AMENDING THE WHATCOM COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The State Growth Management Act and the Whatcom County Code require that all Comprehensive Plan amendments, along with *related* changes to the zoning, be considered together as a package once every year (with certain exceptions). The amendment process is outlined in Chapter 2.160 of the Whatcom County Code. It is summarized as follows:

- The person who wants the amendment completes an application form and environmental checklist. Application forms can be obtained from the Whatcom County Planning & Development Services Dept., 5280 Northwest Drive, Bellingham, WA 98226 or on the Whatcom County Website at <http://www.whatcomcounty.us/pds/planning/index.jsp>
- The person who wants the amendment submits the completed application form, the environmental checklist, and the docketing fee to the Planning Department by December 31.
- 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 the 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 the amendment must pay the fees within 15 days after the County Council signs the resolution initiating the amendment or the application becomes null and void (unless the County Council has waived the fee). Application fees are:

Comprehensive Plan docketing review fee:	\$370
Comprehensive Plan map or text amendment:	\$7,875 ¹
Zoning map or text amendments:	\$7,875 ²
Environmental (SEPA) Checklist:	\$370

Note: Fees are subject to change upon adoption of the Whatcom County Unified Fee Schedule each year by the County Council.

- The Planning Division evaluates the amendments and issues staff reports.
- The Planning Commission conducts public hearings on the amendments throughout the year. The Commission's recommendations are sent to the County Council as they are completed.

¹ This fee provides 55 hours of staff time on the project after it is initiated. Amendments that require more than 55 hours of staff time will be subject to a fee of \$100 per hour.

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WHATCOM COUNTY

Planning & Development Services
5280 Northwest Drive,
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360-676-6907, TTY 800-833-6384
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J.E. "Sam" Ryan
Director

- As amendments are forwarded to the County Council, they are reviewed and either denied or passed on to "concurrent review." The County Council may, if it chooses, hold a hearing before making its decision.
- Final concurrent review will occur around February 1st of each year for the previous year's amendments

In order to approve an initiated Comprehensive Plan amendment, the County must find all of the following:

- (1) That the amendment conforms to the requirements of Growth Management Act, is internally consistent with the comprehensive plan, is consistent with county-wide planning policies and is consistent with any interlocal planning agreements.
- (2) That further studies made or accepted by the department of planning and development services indicate changed conditions that show need for the amendment.
- (3) That 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:
 - (a) The anticipated effect upon the rate or distribution of population growth, employment growth, development, and conversion of land as envisioned in the Comprehensive Plan.
 - (b) 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.
 - (c) Anticipated impact upon designated agricultural, forest and mineral resource lands.
- (4) The amendment does not include nor facilitate illegal spot zoning.

Please note that applications for Comprehensive Plan amendments, along with *related* zoning amendments, must be turned in to the Planning Department by December 31.

You can call the Planning Division if you have questions about Comprehensive Plan amendments or zoning changes. We can be reached at (360) 676-6907.