

Skagit County 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update

Public Comment Period: February 13, 2025 to March 13, 2025

What is a Comprehensive Plan?

The Comprehensive Plan shapes the future of Skagit County. It establishes policies for land use in areas outside of city limits. Over the next twenty years, the Plan will guide physical growth and development, particularly in our rural areas.

We encourage a Plan that protects natural resource lands, open space and rural areas while creating urban growth areas where development should be directed.

With this Plan in particular, due to new state policy, the Plan must also address climate policies. Your comments are needed to help create a vision for effective climate policy and for protecting sensitive natural resources in our County for the next twenty years. Thank you for taking part in this important process.

How to Comment

Option 1- BY EMAIL

Email comments are preferred and must be sent to pdscomments@co.skagit.wa.us with the **proposal name “Skagit County’s 2025 Comprehensive Plan Draft Policies in the subject line.** Include your comments in the body of your email message rather than as attachments. Include your full name and mailing address.

Option 2: - BY LETTER

Paper comments must be printed on 8½x11 paper and mailed or delivered to:

Planning & Development Services Comments on
“Skagit County’s 2025 Comprehensive Plan Draft Policies”
1800 Continental Place
Mount Vernon WA 98273

You may also drop a letter in an envelope off at the County’s Main Desk at 1800 Continental Place.

The Planning Commission will hold a public hearing on the draft Comprehensive Plan at **6pm Tuesday, March 11th at 1800 Continental Place, Mount Vernon.** If you are interested in commenting at the meeting, please email pdscomments@co.skagit.wa.us, with your name, phone number, and request to be added to the speakers list.

All comments must be received by 4:30pm, March 13, 2025 and include your full name and mailing address. Comments not meeting these requirements will not be considered.

For information on Skagit County’s 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update process, go to the County website project page. Included are the four main topics and a timeline for drafts and public comment periods, both written and in-person into 2025.

<https://www.skagitcounty.net/Departments/PlanningAndPermit/2025CPA.htm>

Comment Guidelines

Below you will see topics with bullet points you can use to write your comments. These are only suggestions. Writing from the heart about the issues you care about is the best. If you wish, briefly say something about who you are, what you love about living in Skagit County, and why protecting rural lands and natural areas are important to you.

1. RECOMMEND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ENVIRONMENTAL ADVISORY BOARD (EAB)

Background: At the start of the 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update process, the County reached out to the public asking for input at Open Houses and later via written comment. Support for an **Environmental Advisory Board (EAB)** was expressed at the Open Houses, and in **59 of the 90 comments** submitted to PDS by the public regarding the Climate element of the revised Comprehensive Plan 2025 Update this past Fall. Yet the creation of an EAB is mentioned nowhere in the current draft of the Comprehensive Plan.

Skagit County's natural environment is multi-layered with a variety of diverse ecosystems, open space, and critical areas. County policy states that decisions about these complex areas will be based on "best available science", yet Skagit County does not have an Environmental Advisory Board (EAB) to assist county decision makers in addressing environmental issues that are made increasingly complex as the impacts of climate change intensify.

- **Recommend:** The County needs to respond to what a clear majority of the public participating in the comprehensive plan process has requested and include in the Environmental Element of the Comprehensive Plan a policy creating an Environmental Advisory Board (EAB).
 - The Environmental Advisory Board will be made up of people who have lived experience and those with professional expertise on a variety of environmental issues, including land conservation and stewardship, habitat restoration, climate science, greenhouse gas emissions reduction, climate impacts mitigation and adaptation, urban planning, geology & geomorphology, open space issues like bike and walking paths, natural sciences, and conservation biology. This will help the County Commissioners and the Planning Department look at environmental issues holistically and make decisions based on the best available science. In addition to researchers, scientists, and educators, the Environmental Advisory Board could include younger people and underserved people so the commissioners could hear from people who do not usually have the opportunity to contribute to environmental policy planning.
 - The EAB would report to and make recommendations to the Skagit County Commissioners on natural resource and environmental plans, policies, and programs. Examples include legislation affecting natural lands, open space, waters and wildlife habitat; land use decisions affecting the long-term sustainability of natural processes like rivers and marine shorelines; natural solutions to improve climate preparedness; environmental justice and environmental stewardship.
 - An EAB would ensure that best available science is consistently included in local planning. It could maintain active outreach to county partners, stakeholder groups, tribal governments, and underserved community members.

2. RURAL ELEMENT: OPPOSE INCREASED DENSITY IN RURAL VILLAGES

Background: According to the Rural Element draft on p. 76 (redlines version) of the draft Comp Plan, the Skagit Council of Governments Growth Monitoring Report shows that the rural area accepted 24.6% of the County's growth from 2017-2022, compared to 75.4% for the urban areas. This reflects a movement in the wrong direction from the 2000 to 2010 period when rural area growth was 21% versus 79% for the urban area.

Recommend: Strongly oppose any effort to create additional development potential in the rural area, as appears to be the intent in policy 3B-1.6, as discussed below.

- **Strongly oppose the new provision of policy 3C-1.6(b)** that the Rural Village Residential land density may be up to "4 dwelling per acres" (sic) for certain housing types which may be more affordable. Four dwelling units per acre has never been an allowable density in the rural area under the Growth Management Act (GMA).
- **Encourage residential development in cities and towns as the best way to promote affordable housing in Skagit County.** The most recent population growth trends show the county moving away from the GMA goal of limiting growth in the rural area to no more than 20 percent. Allowing additional density in the rural area, even for the important purpose of increasing affordable housing, is moving in the wrong direction.
- Allowing certain housing types which may be more affordable is a worthwhile goal, but it should not be coupled with an increase in residential densities in Rural Village Residential.