



Island County 2025 Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update

Public Participation Plan DRAFT

Introduction

Island County is conducting a periodic update to its comprehensive plan, due by June 30, 2025. Throughout the process of updating the comprehensive plan, the public will be encouraged to participate and help shape growth in the county over the next 20 years. This Public Participation Plan ensures early, continuous, and inclusive public participation, as required by Washington State Law (RCW 36.70A).

Comprehensive Plan Overview

The Growth Management Act (GMA) was passed in Washington State in 1990 to help local jurisdictions manage their growth. The GMA requires periodic updates of comprehensive plans to comply with changes to state law, changes to land use, and updated population growth, housing, and employment projections. A comprehensive plan generally guides growth in the county for a 20-year period and the land use decisions made in a comprehensive plan have long-term effects. During an update, the public has an opportunity to provide input on how and where growth should occur which will help shape how their communities may look in the future.

Goals of the Public Participation Plan

- Ensure broad participation, solicit input from diverse stakeholders, and ensure that no single group or interest dominates the process.
- Maintain and establish meaningful relationships with partner municipalities, organizations, and groups through continuous direct outreach and coordination.
- Provide equitable opportunities for public participation in each of the four Island County planning areas (North Whidbey, Central Whidbey, South Whidbey, and Camano Island).
- Focus resources on soliciting input on elements of the update process likely to be of greatest interest/impact to the public.
- Make use of in-person and online communication technologies to efficiently distribute information and create multiple opportunities for engagement.
- Transparently and proactively share information with the public about all opportunities to provide input including meetings, hearings, surveys, workshops, legislative actions, etc.

Communications Principles and Tactics

The following principles will guide the County's public outreach efforts:

- Public outreach should be intentional and specific, making it easy for individuals to engage.
- Public outreach should be equitable to meet the differing needs of different audiences.
- Public outreach should be iterative, clearly stating how input will be used in decision making.

The following tactics will be utilized in assessing which communications tools and outreach methods to implement:

- Identify communities most impacted by planned growth and any development changes and establish best practices for communicating with these communities.
- Engage with affected communities early and often to establish, build, and maintain meaningful relationships.
- Clearly communicate the public participation goal when conducting engagement, be specific with requests for input, and define a feedback loop to share how the input was used.
- Remove barriers for participation, consider location and time of day of meetings/events, consider providing food and childcare as resources allow, provide materials in multiple languages, and offer multiple ways to participate.

Emphasis on Vulnerable and Historically Underserved Communities

Historically, members of the public who choose to participate in planning processes tend to be individuals who have flexibility in their work to attend meetings during the day, individuals with a technical background, or community members who are retired. Planning processes that do not try to engage more diverse audiences can perpetuate inequity by reflecting the values and desires of people who hold power and privilege in a community.

To encourage diverse participation and build trust during this comprehensive planning process, Island County intends to focus public engagement efforts on including communities who are vulnerable and/or have historically been underserved. Examples of vulnerable and underserved communities may include veterans, seniors, youth, immigrants and refugees, people of low income, people with disabilities, and people of color.

Decision Making for Comprehensive Plan

Island County Planning and Community Development is the department tasked with coordinating the periodic update for the 2025 Comprehensive Plan, with assistance and support from other county departments. Planning staff will conduct the public outreach efforts outlined under this Public Participation Plan. Planning staff will also perform the technical review work and draft the

policy updates necessary to meet the conditions in the GMA and State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA).

Island County Planning Commission advises on comprehensive plan updates. The Planning Commission consists of nine members who are appointed by the Board of Island County Commissioners to make recommendations on planning related matters including growth and development. The Planning Commission will review and advise on comprehensive plan updates throughout 2023-2025 during their regular meeting and work session agendas.

Island County Board of Commissioners is the County's legislative authority and holds the decision-making authority on the 2025 Comprehensive Plan process. The Board of Commissioners is made up of three commissioners who represent geographic districts of Whidbey and Camano islands based on population. The Board of County Commissioners will review and act on comprehensive plan updates throughout 2023-2025 during their regular meetings and work session agendas.

Communication Tools

The communications tools that will be used by Island County during the comprehensive plan update process may include, but are not limited to:

- Website – Planning and Community Development (planning staff) will regularly update its website with comprehensive plan information. Relevant documents and schedules will be posted on the website along with announcements and notices concerning upcoming meetings, hearings, and public involvement opportunities.
- Email List – Planning staff will maintain a list of individuals or groups who have expressed an interest in the comprehensive plan update process. The email list will be used to disseminate announcements and notices. Current list has over 8,000 subscribers.
- Direct Mail – Postcards or other informational materials may be directly mailed to residents during the comprehensive plan update process to notify the public about opportunities to participate, key dates or deadlines, and/or public meetings and hearings.
- News Releases – For major topics and decisions, Island County will prepare press releases and distribute to local papers.
- Social Media – Planning staff will use already established social media platforms to promote public meetings and opportunities to provide formal public comment (those social media channels already owned by Island County or by partner organizations and community groups) in the comprehensive plan update process.
- Posters – Hang posters about public events or opportunities to comment at common gathering places in affected communities such as community centers, libraries, food banks, etc.
- Commissioners Town Hall and/or Newsletters – During key milestones in the comprehensive plan process, planning staff will work with the Board of Island County

Commissioners (BOCC) to provide information via regularly scheduled Town Halls and in regular newsletters, as deemed appropriate by the Commissioners.

- Issue Papers – Issue papers will provide focused guidance to decision makers and document the evolution of the update process. Prior to the final adoption stage, planning staff will compile all of the issue papers into a single background report. Planning staff will post issue papers on the department’s website as they are prepared.

Outreach Methods

The outreach methods that will be used by Island County during the comprehensive plan update process may include, but are not limited to:

- Focus Groups / Technical Advisory Groups – In order to solicit guidance on specific issues or complex technical issues, planning staff may utilize BOCC approved Focus Groups or Technical Advisory Groups. These groups will include members who have specific knowledge or interest in certain topics or can effectively represent a subset of the community. Focus Groups or Technical Advisory Groups may have members from business groups, trade organizations, interest groups, Government agencies, County departments, community or environmental groups, and/or members of the public.
- Paid Focus Groups – One method that could be used for engaging historically underserved members of the public who may not otherwise be able to participate in a Focus Group or Technical Advisory Group, is to provide payment for their service. Members would have to demonstrate that their employer would not otherwise compensate them for their time on the Focus Group or Technical Advisory Group and would be paid an hourly rate commensurate with a living wage in Island County. [See [PSRC Compensation Policy](#) for an example model of how this could work.]
- Surveys – For specific topics where planning staff feel they could benefit from specific feedback on the comprehensive plan updates, surveys may be utilized to better understand the community’s point of view. Surveys could be administered online or in-person at outreach events.
- Community Events / Fairs and Festivals – Planning staff will utilize already established community events to share information about the comprehensive plan process. During the summer 2024, the County will host booths at events like farmers markets, local parades, and annual community events.
- Public Meetings / Workshops – Public meetings and workshops are informal public gatherings to solicit public feedback on Island County’s planning efforts. Public meetings or workshops may involve presentations by planning staff, question and answer sessions, and interactive activities.
- Public Hearings – Public Hearings are a formal public process conducted and held before the BOCC or the Island County Planning Commission.

- Council of Governments – Issues requiring a high level of intergovernmental coordination or decision making may be forwarded to the Island County Council of Governments for discussion. In particular, the Council of Governments will take a leading role in updating the County Wide Planning Policies.
- Board of Commissioners Work Sessions – Planning staff will frequently attend works sessions in order to brief Board members on the update process.
- Planning Commission Work Sessions – Planning staff will frequently attend work sessions in order to brief Planning Commission members on the update process.

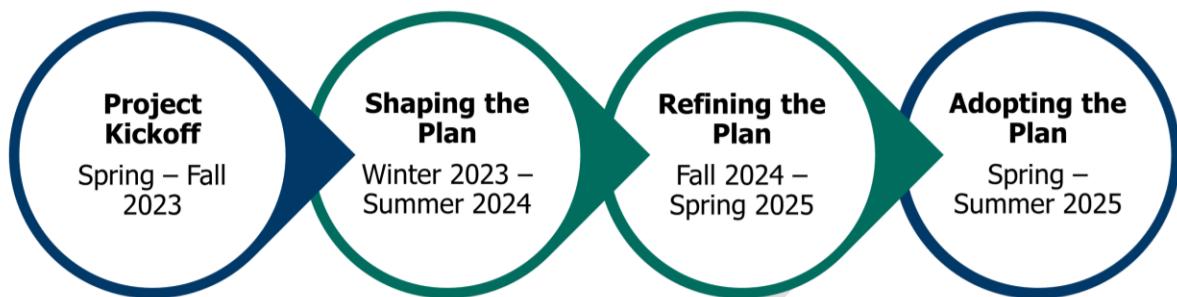
Key Audiences

The audiences that will be engaged by Island County during the comprehensive planning process may include, but are not limited to:

- **Members of the public**, with an emphasis on vulnerable and historically underserved communities
- **Island County Departments:** Public Health, Public Works, Human Services, Facilities, Dept. of Emergency Management, Environmental Health, Marine Resources Committee, Diversity Equity and Inclusion, County Administrator, Prosecuting Attorney, Conservation Futures Program, Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Team
- **Cities/Towns:** City of Oak Harbor, Town of Coupeville, City of Langley
- **Tribal Governments:** Samish, Stillaguamish, Swinomish, Tulalip, Sauk-Suiattle, other tribes as applicable
- **Federal Government:** Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, U.S. Coast Guard, Army Corps of Engineers
- **State Agencies:** Dept. of Ecology, Dept. of Commerce, Office of Financial Management, WSDOT, Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, Dept. of Natural Resources, Dept. of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Puget Sound Partnership
- **Local Organizations:** Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve, North Whidbey Parks and Recreation, South Whidbey Parks and Recreation, Island County Historical Society, Friends of Camano Island Parks, libraries, community councils, churches, groceries/farmers markets, book stores, other local businesses that serve as gathering places
- **Environmental Groups:** Whidbey Camano Land Trust, Whidbey Island Conservation District, Snohomish Conservation District, Whidbey Environmental Action Network, Conservation Futures

- **Agriculture / Farm Groups:** Whidbey Island Grown, Whidbey Island Conservation District, Growing Veterans, South Whidbey Tilth, NW Ag Council, school gardens/community gardens, Goosefoot
- **Economic Groups:** Whidbey Island Economic Development Council, Chambers of Commerce, Port of South Whidbey, Port of Coupeville, Northwest Workforce Development Council, rotary clubs
- **Housing Groups:** Island County Housing Advisory Board, Housing Authority of Island County, Camano Island Housing Task Group, Ituha Crisis Stabilization Center, SPIN Café, Low Income Housing Institute, Thinc Whidbey, Goosefoot, Shelter Resources, Habitat for Humanity, Whidbey Homelessness Coalition, builders and developers
- **Transportation Groups:** IRTPO, Island Transit, Public Works, Whidbey SeaTac Shuttle, Sno-Goose Transit
- **Utility Providers:** PSE, SNOPUD, Freeland Water and Sewer District, Camano Fire, Oak Harbor Fire, NW Fire, South Whidbey Fire & EMS, Central Whidbey Fire, Island County Broadband Action Team
- **Veteran Groups:** Veterans Advisory Board, Whidbey Island Veteran Resource Center, VFWs, American Legions, Opportunity Council, Disabled American Veterans
- **Senior Service Groups:** Island Senior Resources, Northwest Senior Services Board, Camano Center, Camano Island Senior Center, Oak Harbor Senior Center
- **Social Service Groups:** Community Health Advisory Board, North Sound Behavioral Health Organization Advisory Board, DSHS, Whidbey Health, Compass Health, Skagit Regional Clinic, Camano Island Health System, Sunrise Services, Whidbey Island Nourishes, Goosefoot, Good Cheer, South Whidbey CARES Coalition, Compass Health, CADA, Opportunity Council, Stanwood Camano Community Resource Center, Stanwood Camano Area Foundation, Whidbey Community Foundation, food banks, homeless shelters, churches
- **Youth Service Groups:** Oak Harbor School District, Coupeville School District, South Whidbey School District, Stanwood-Camano School District, Boys & Girls Clubs, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Island County, Stanwood Camano YMCA, Stanwood Camano Community Resource Center, Skagit Valley College, Pediatric Associations of Whidbey Island, Ryan's House for Youth, childcare centers and early childhood education providers, church youth groups, sports clubs
- **News Outlets:** South Whidbey Record, Whidbey News-Times, Stanwood-Camano News, Everett Herald, Drews List

Key Milestones and Engagement Opportunities



Key Tasks / Engagement Opportunities	Anticipated Date <i>(all dates are estimates and may change)</i>
Project Kickoff	
Draft Public Participation Plan	Sept. 2023
Proposed changes to CWPP	Fall 2023
Project kickoff awareness building	Fall 2023
Establish website for regular updates	Fall 2023
Attend community meetings to build relationships	Fall 2023
Shaping the Plan	
Agency / Partner Meetings	Winter 2023-24
Housing Workshop	Spring 2024
Conservation / Natural Resources Workshop	Spring 2024
Sub Area Plans Workshops	Spring 2024
Attend community meetings to share information and encourage participation	Spring/Summer 2024
Community Events / Fairs and Festivals (list specific ones if known)	Summer 2024
BOCC Meetings / Work Sessions	Winter, Spring, Summer 2024
Planning Commission Meetings / Work Sessions	Winter, Spring, Summer 2024
Refining the Plan	
Agency Partner Meetings	Fall 2024
Draft Element Review	Winter 2024-25
Attend community meetings to encourage comments and participation in upcoming public meetings	Winter 2024-25
BOCC Meetings / Work Sessions	Fall-Winter 2024, Spring 2025
Planning Commission Meetings / Work Sessions	Fall-Winter 2024, Spring 2025
Public Meetings (North, Central, South, Camano)	Spring 2025
Adopting the Plan	
SEPA Determination	Spring 2025
Public Hearings for Comp Plan Changes	Spring-Summer 2025
Public Hearings for Code Changes	Spring-Summer 2025
BOCC Meetings / Work Sessions	Spring-Summer 2025
Planning Commission Meetings / Work Sessions	Spring-Summer 2025

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