



Snohomish County

Planning and Development Services

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Snohomish County Planning Commission

FROM: Eileen Canola, Senior Planner

SUBJECT: Proposed Climate Change and Resiliency Element

DATE: June 26, 2023

Dave Somers
County Executive

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this staff report is to outline and provide information on staff-recommended amendments to Snohomish County's GMA Comprehensive Plan for the proposed Climate Change and Resiliency Element (CRE). A briefing on the recommended amendments will occur at the July 25, 2023, Planning Commission meeting.

BACKGROUND

Under current state law, a Climate Change and Resiliency Element (CRE) is an optional element for Snohomish County until 2029. The County is bringing the CRE forward in 2024, as it is evident that immediate action and continued planning for climate change is necessary. The County recognizes the impacts of climate change on its communities, environment, economy, and infrastructure – both current and projected. The Puget Sound region has experienced an increase in extreme heat events, wildfire risk, days of poor air quality, storms, flooding, sea-level rise, and reduced snowpack. The detrimental effects of a changing climate are felt locally and on a global scale. The proposed CRE provides a policy framework to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and increase climate resiliency that is consistent with regional and local directives and supports state efforts. Moreover, this CRE is modeled after draft guidance provided by the Washington State Department of Commerce (Commerce).

As part of the 2021 budget, the Washington State Legislature appropriated funding for Commerce to assist jurisdictions for early climate change planning by developing guidance. Specifically, the state directed Commerce to develop guidance for a climate change element and provide other assistance to integrate climate change into comprehensive plans. Commerce's guidance includes a framework to develop a climate change element, checklists, suggested policies, and a variety of measures for GHG reduction and resilience. The final version of Commerce's climate change guidance was due in June 2023; however, Commerce has pushed back the date to December 2023.

Through state funding, Commerce provided grant opportunities for jurisdictions to address GHG emissions and increase climate resiliency. The County applied for and received funding from Commerce

to develop a climate change vulnerability and risk assessment to inform the comprehensive plan. The CRE is divided into two subelements of GHG reduction and resiliency. Findings from the vulnerability and risk assessment were used to develop policies in the Resiliency subelement and will help inform and prioritize County projects. PDS staff provided the Planning Commission with an informational briefing on the Commerce climate change grant work at the May 23, 2023, Planning Commission meeting.

Modeled after Commerce’s climate change guidance, the proposed CRE contains:

- I. An introductory section with an overarching goal, objectives, and policies that apply to the entire CRE. The introductory section provides information on climate change and its current and projected impacts based on information from the University of Washington Climate Impacts Group.
- II. A GHG Emissions Reduction subelement with a narrative and associated policies. This subelement includes a policy framework to help meet the regional target for GHG emissions reduction, which supports state targets, and introduces a countywide GHG emissions inventory that was completed in 2022.
- III. A Resiliency subelement with a narrative and associated policies. The policy framework for this subelement provides actions and strategies that prioritize assistance to the people who are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and increases coordination with the County’s Hazard Mitigation Plan.

Growth Management Act (GMA)

The Growth Management Act (GMA), Chapter 36.70A RCW, was enacted in 1990 to plan for growth in the state in a coordinated, cost effective, and efficient manner with guiding planning goals and requirements for comprehensive plans and development regulations. Over the years, amendments to the GMA responded to emerging issues, clarifications, and refinements. During the 2023 Legislative session, the GMA was amended through Engrossed Second Substitute House Bill ([ESS HB 1181](#)), effective July 23, 2023, the provisions of which included:

- Amending RCW 36.70A.020 “Planning Goals” to add a Climate Change and Resiliency planning goal; and
- Amending RCW 36.70A.070 “Comprehensive Plans - Mandatory Elements” to add Climate Change and Resiliency as one of the mandatory elements of comprehensive plans.
- Requirements to update Transportation Elements and incorporate a Climate Change and Resiliency Element by 2029.

The GMA planning goals (RCW 36.70A.020), help guide jurisdictions with the development and adoption of their comprehensive plans and development regulations. The newly added Climate Change and Resiliency planning goal is the most relevant to the CRE, and the CRE will help the county comply with the GMA:

(14) Climate change and resiliency. Ensure that comprehensive plans, development regulations, and regional policies, plans, and strategies under RCW 36.70A.210 and chapter 47.80 RCW adapt to and mitigate the effects of a changing climate; support reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and per capita vehicle miles traveled; prepare for climate impact scenarios; foster resiliency to climate impacts and natural hazards; protect and enhance environmental, economic, and human health and safety; and advance environmental justice.

PSRC VISION 2050

Puget Sound Regional Council's (PSRC's) VISION 2050 includes multicounty planning policies (MPPs) and a Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) for the Central Puget Sound to accommodate an increase of 1.5 million people by 2050. In general, the RGS directs projected growth to urban areas, regional growth centers, countywide centers, local centers, and high-capacity transit station areas, while minimizing rural growth. The MPPs support the RGS and cover a range of topics to support the development of countywide plans and those of local jurisdictions toward a regional vision. The MPPs also emphasize equity, sustainability, and resiliency.

VISION 2050's Climate Change chapter provides background information, twelve climate change (CC) policies, and a regional GHG emission reduction target from the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency. The narrative relays the urgency from the United Nation's 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, that continued global warming of 1.5° Celsius would pose worsening impacts and irreversible damage.

VISION 2050 Regional GHG Emissions Reduction Target

"In February 2017, the board of the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency adopted the following economy-wide greenhouse gas emission reduction targets for the four-county central Puget Sound region:

- By 2030, reduce overall greenhouse gas emissions in the region to 50% below 1990 levels.
- By 2050, reduce overall greenhouse gas emissions in the region to 80% below 1990 levels."

Snohomish County Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs)

The Snohomish County Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs) are guided by the GMA and VISION 2050 and reflect the county's local circumstances. The CPPs support coordination between the comprehensive plans of the County and the 19 cities and towns. The CPPs also support coordination with tribal governments, special purpose districts, and other agencies.

The CPPs contain seven climate change specific policies that inform this element. The CPPs reinforce the regional GHG emission reduction target in VISION 2050 and mirror MPP climate change policies.

PROPOSED COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AMENDMENTS

1. The CRE is a new addition to the County's comprehensive plan.
2. The CRE includes an Introduction and narrative section with an overarching goal, objectives, and policies. There are two subelements in the CRE; GHG Emissions Reduction and Resiliency. Both subelements contain a narrative section and goals, objectives, and policies that are reflected in Attachments A and B of this staff report.
3. The narrative sections of the CRE provide a connection to other Elements of the Plan that address GHG emissions reduction, carbon sequestration, and resiliency.
4. Policies under Goals 9, 10, and 11 of the current Natural Environment chapter of the General Policy Plan (GPP) were either deleted or transferred, with or without amendment, into the CRE. Policies were deleted if the intent was adequately covered by another policy or policies in the CRE.

ANALYSIS

The following analysis provides a summary of the proposed amendments' compliance with state law, MPPs, and CPPs.

Compliance with State Law

The proposed CRE establishes a policy framework to adapt and prepare for the impacts of climate change and reduce GHG emissions. This policy framework (see Attachment A) furthers several GMA planning goals, specifically new planning goal 14.

Specific climate and resiliency (CR) policies in the proposed CRE that speak to GMA Planning Goal 14 include Goals 1, 2, 3; and policies 2.A.2, 2.A.3, 2.A.4, 3.A.1, 3.A.2, 3.B.1, 3.B.3, 3.B.4, 3.B.6, 3.C.1.

GMA planning goals 8, 9, and 10 are also addressed through policies in the CRE:

(8) Natural resource industries. Maintain and enhance natural resource-based industries, including productive timber, agricultural, and fisheries industries. Encourage the conservation of productive forestlands and productive agricultural lands and discourage incompatible uses.

CR policy 3.C.1 regarding agricultural resiliency addresses GMA planning goal 8.

(9) Open space and recreation. Retain open space and green space, enhance recreational opportunities, enhance fish and wildlife habitat, increase access to natural resource lands and water, and develop parks and recreation facilities.

CR Policies in the proposed CRE that help achieve GMA planning goal 9 include CR policies 3.B.7 and 3.C.6.

(10) Environment. Protect the environment and enhance the state's high quality of life, including air and water quality, and the availability of water.

CR policies in the proposed CRE that help achieve GMA planning goal 10 include CR policies 2.C.4, 3.B.7, and 3.C.6.

(11) Citizen participation and coordination. Encourage the involvement of citizens in the planning process, including the participation of vulnerable populations and overburdened communities, and ensure coordination between communities and jurisdictions to reconcile conflicts.

CR policies in the proposed CRE that help achieve GMA planning goal 11 include policies 2.C.2 and 3.A.3.

Compliance with the Multi-County Planning Policies

VISION 2050's multicounty planning policies (MPPs) focus on GHG emission reduction, carbon sequestration, and climate change resiliency and adaptation. Vision 2050 places a great emphasis on equity and stresses assistance to the most vulnerable populations to the impacts of climate change. The draft CRE address the twelve-climate change (CC) policies of the MPPs, which are listed below.

- MPP-CC-1- Advance the adoption and implementation of actions that substantially reduce greenhouse gas emissions in support of state, regional, and local emissions reduction goals, including targets adopted by the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency.
- MPP-CC-2- Reduce building energy use through green building and retrofit of existing buildings.

- MPP-CC-3- Reduce greenhouse gases by expanding the use of conservation and alternative energy sources, electrifying the transportation system, and reducing vehicle miles traveled by increasing alternatives to driving alone.
- MPP-CC-4- Protect and restore natural resources that sequester and store carbon such as forests, farmland, wetlands, estuaries, and urban tree canopy.
- MPP-CC-6- Address impacts to vulnerable populations and areas that have been disproportionately affected by climate change.
- MPP-CC-7- Advance state, regional, and local actions that support resilience and adaptation to climate change impacts.
- MPP-CC-8- Increase resilience by identifying and addressing the impacts of climate change and natural hazards on water, land, infrastructure, health, and the economy. Prioritize actions to protect the most vulnerable populations.
- MPP-CC-9- Identify and address the impacts of climate change on the region's hydrological systems.
- MPP-CC-10- Address rising sea water by siting and planning for relocation of hazardous industries and essential public services away from the 500-year floodplain.
- MPP-CC-11- Support achievement of regional greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals through countywide planning policies and local comprehensive plans.
- MPP-CC-12- Prioritize transportation investments that support achievement of regional greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals, such as by reducing vehicle miles traveled.

Compliance with the Countywide Planning Policies

The seven climate change policies of the Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs) are reflected in the draft CRE. The GHG Emissions Reduction subelement of the CRE is consistent with the CPPs climate change policies regarding GHG emissions reductions and carbon sequestration. The Resiliency subelement of the CRE is consistent with the climate change policies of the CPP related to resiliency.

- CPP-CC-1- The County and cities shall incorporate emissions reduction actions into local plans and collaborate with regional and state agencies on initiatives to ensure that air quality meets or exceeds established state and federal standards and greenhouse gas emissions are reduced in accordance with the goals of the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency. Any initiatives which exceed established state and federal standards shall be voluntary between jurisdictions and are not required by CC-1.
- CPP-CC-2- The County and cities should support the implementation of the state's climate change initiatives and work toward developing a common framework to analyze climate change impacts when conducting environmental review under SEPA.
- CPP-CC-3- The County and cities should establish and/or support programs that work to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase energy conservation, including the retrofit of existing buildings, expansion of alternative/clean energy within the public and private sector, and the use of environmentally sustainable building techniques and materials.
- CPP-CC-4- The County and cities should use natural systems to reduce carbon in the atmosphere by establishing programs and policies that maintain and increase natural resources that sequester and store carbon, such as forests, vegetative cover, wetlands, farmland, and estuaries.

- CPP-CC-5- The County and cities should plan for climate adaptation and resilience by establishing a planning framework in local plans and coordinating regionally to identify, anticipate, prepare for, and adapt to likely impacts of climate change on natural systems, infrastructure, public health, and the economy. These efforts should identify measures to mitigate climate impacts and include a focus on minimizing these impacts upon highly impacted and vulnerable populations.
- CPP-CC-6- The County and cities should support the achievement of regional greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets through adoption of policies and implementation of actions including identification of emissions reduction goals in local plans and providing support for land use, transportation, and development policies that reduce vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions from transportation.
- CPP-CC-7- Jurisdictions should consider rising sea level by planning for the siting of new and relocation of existing essential public facilities and hazardous industries to areas that are outside the 500-year floodplain.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The GMA requires early and continuous public participation (Goal 11 and RCW 36.70A.140). Public participation for the CRE has been provided to date through:

- SEPA Scoping which began November 1, 2021, and ended on December 3, 2021.
- Climate Change Vulnerability and Risk Assessment Virtual Open Houses held on March 13 and 29, 2023. Background information was provided on the Climate Change and Resiliency Element. The meetings were held in English and translated into Spanish and Korean.
- The draft CRE policies were posted on [the 2024 Comprehensive Plan Update webpage](#) for public comment from March 31 to May 1, 2023. Progress on the CRE has been available through the 2024 Comprehensive Plan Update webpage and periodic newsletters.
- Briefings to the County's interdepartmental climate and resiliency committee (ICRC) provided at regular intervals from December 2022 to June 2023.
- Briefings to the community group, Climate Action Advisory Committee (CAAC) provided at regular intervals from September 2022 to June 2023.
- Briefing at the May 9, 2023, Snohomish County Agricultural Advisory Board Meeting.

In general, the comments received during the 30-day public comment period were supportive and confirmed the need to address climate change. Approximately 35 comments were received on the draft policies for the Climate Change and Resiliency Element. There were several suggestions to add language for coordination with interest groups regarding climate change and resiliency efforts. Concern was expressed regarding the availability of funding for implementation measures. There was also concern that the implementation of the draft policies would affect housing costs. All public comments are available in the index of records.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The County issued a Determination of Significance (DS) for the 2024 Update to the Plan on November 1, 2021. A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) will likely be issued in September 2023, followed by a Final Environmental Impact Statement before adoption of the 2024 Update to the Plan.

NOTIFICATION OF STATE AGENCIES

Pursuant to RCW 36.70A.106, a notice of intent to adopt the proposed amendments will be transmitted to the Washington State Department of Commerce for the entirety of the 2024 Update to the Comprehensive Plan in September 2023.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends approval of the proposed comprehensive plan amendments and findings contained in this staff report.

ACTION REQUESTED

The Planning Commission is requested to hold a public hearing, consider the proposed comprehensive plan amendments, and provide a recommendation to the County Council. The Planning Commission can recommend approval of the amendments with supporting findings of fact as proposed or modified, deny the proposal with findings, or amend the proposal with appropriate findings.

cc: Ken Klein, Executive Director
Mike McCrary, PDS Director
Lori Burke, Assistant Fire Marshal
David Killingstad, PDS Long Range Planning Manager
Ryan Countryman, Senior Legislative Analyst
Tom Teigen, Director, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR)
Gregg Farris, Director, Surface Water Management, DCNR
JaNae Nelson, Director, Facilities
Kelly Snyder, Director, Department of Public Works (DPW)
David Schonhard, Director, Solid Waste Division, DPW
Lucia Schmit, Director of Emergency Management

Attachments

Attachment A – Draft Policies for the Climate Change and Resiliency Element

Attachment B – Draft Narrative for Climate Change and Resiliency Element