



To Mason County Planning Advisory Committee
From: Alicia Ayars, AICP
Date: March 15, 2024
Project: 2024 Comprehensive Plan Update
Subject Comprehensive Plan and Climate Resiliency Planning Update

This document serves as a discussion guide for the Mason County Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) on topics related to the Mason County Comprehensive Plan Update and will focus on the following topics:

1. Stakeholder interview overview
 - a. Impacts to county-wide planning policies and goals
2. Climate Resiliency Planning – scope of work and next steps
3. Update on the City of Shelton Comprehensive Plan Update

Stakeholder Interview Overview

Between February 21 and March 14, 2024, the SCJ consultant team conducted a series of video interviews with parties identified by Mason County as being associated with or representing interests regarding the Comprehensive Plan Update process.

As implied by the effort's working title, the primary purpose of each interview was to gather information pertinent to the Mason County current Comprehensive plan updates, priorities for improvement, and ideas for future development. The interviews provided feedback on common themes in the community, as well as ideas for creative solutions that help to develop the eventual recommendations to directly inform the Comprehensive Plan.

The interviews typically lasted between 60 minutes, with conversational flexibility guided by each interviewee's own viewpoints and interests. As this was the first phase of gathering community feedback, many participants expressed an interest in staying connected for future outreach efforts.

The following list presents the individuals interviewed, their affiliation/association in the town, and the day they were interviewed. A list of all person's consultants attempted to reach for interviews will be included in the interview summary document and we will provide this at a later date.

Group 1 – February 22 – Mason County Public Utilities Districts, League of Women Voters, Belfair Water District Mary M Knight School District.

Group 2 – February 23 – North, Central, & South Mason Fire Districts

Group 3 – February 21 – Shelton, Hood Canal, Pioneer, Southside, Grape

Group 4 – February 21 – North Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Council of Mason County

Group 5 – February 22 – Port of Shelton, WDFW, & WSDOT

Group 6 – March 14 - Local Tribes

Group 7 – March 4 - City of Shelton

The interview's provided valuable information about Mason County and relates to the counties Comprehensive Plan. SCJ has summarized this information into key themes by group interviews.

Key Themes

The themes below provide a summary of the comments received on overarching and reoccurring topics during the stakeholder interview process.

- 1. Land Use and Growth Management:** Strategies are employed to concentrate growth, minimize urban sprawl, and mitigate impacts on waterways and salmon habitats. Buffer requirements and habitat connectivity are considered in land use planning, with a focus on UGA amendments, open space opportunities, and the safe system approach to transportation planning.
- 2. Transportation and Infrastructure Development:** Transportation safety, including fish passage and the Belfair Bypass project, is a priority. Attention is paid to US101 between Shelton and Olympia, with a focus on operational integrity and accommodating growth in South Mason County. Expansion of electrical lines and potential runway extensions are also considerations.
- 3. Environmental Stewardship and Habitat Management:** There's a commitment to working with local habitat biologists and adhering to best available science to ensure the protection of critical habitats and species. Efforts are made to maintain no net loss for critical areas functions and values, with a renewed focus on salmon recovery, habitat connectivity, and climate resilience.
- 4. Infrastructure Challenges and Planning:** South Mason faces issues with strategic planning and facilities due to being completely out of room. There's a need for a multiuse or safety facility, potentially in partnership with law enforcement, dispatch, and public works. In Central Mason, there's a lack of a training facility and staffing issues, necessitating collaboration efforts through public-private partnerships (PPP) and discussions with the Port.
- 5. Community Growth and Change:** Squaxin Tribe outpacing South Mason in growth rate prompts the need for better coordination with the county to plan for services. Growth in North County will alter the appearance, commercial base, and fire services, with concerns about loss of revenue and economic activity. Topographical challenges and infrastructure deficiencies contribute to the need for road upgrades and a pro-growth attitude.
- 6. Public Health and Safety Concerns:** Collaboration on addressing opium use/abuse in North Mason has seen success, with a focus on upstream prevention work and mental health initiatives. Coordination with the Tribe and operations within the county face challenges, including a lack of consideration for cumulative impacts and revenue constraints.

- 7. Workforce and Funding Challenges:** Recruitment and retention issues plague the fire department, with difficulty competing with surrounding counties' wages and benefits. The funding system needs an overhaul, with a shift towards senior taxing districts and consideration of modern needs beyond historic volunteer-based systems. Staffing shortages and overtaxed systems exacerbate operational challenges.
- 8. Opportunities for Improvement:** Despite challenges, opportunities exist in equipment, facilities, training, growth, and education. Outreach efforts to local institutions and community events aim to address workforce needs and promote collaboration. Streamlining transportation and infrastructure processes can support economic development and address growth-related challenges.
- 9. Housing and Economic Concerns:** Housing prices and wage disparities with adjoining counties create difficulties in hiring local staff. Competition with the private sector, transportation issues, and the need for proactive economic development discussions underscore the broader challenges facing the county.

10. Port of Shelton:

- 1. Sanderson Field Airport:** The airport is the highest priority project, with plans underway for a master plan update spanning 23 years. There's no expected need to update the airport protection overlay zone. The former fairgrounds site south of the runway is slated for redevelopment.
- 2. Environmental Considerations:** The airport is home to endangered species, including nesting and breeding habitats. Species like the Shelton pocket gopher and the Oregon Vesper sparrow, monitored by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, have been identified on-site.
- 3. Johns Prairie Industrial Park:** This area, previously used for heavy industrial purposes, now hosts lighter industrial activities, contributing to the economic development efforts of the Port of Shelton. There's interest in commercial development, particularly in properties like the Johns Prairie Industrial Park. Demand for hangar space and potential expansion of airports indicate a growing general aviation sector. Potential projects from the Commerce Department could drive job growth.

11. City of Shelton

- 1. Coordination and Planning:** Recent improvements in coordination have been observed at the staff level, but there's still work to be done at the elected level. Efforts are being made towards more effective Urban Growth Area (UGA) planning to meet city standards, especially regarding utilities, infrastructure, and land use. Challenges with annexation and coordinating growth between the county, city, and Port of Shelton persist.
- 2. Housing and Homelessness:** Affordable housing and homelessness are significant issues, with a lack of housing stock and increasing homeless populations. Efforts are being made to address these issues through various initiatives such as workforce housing projects and transitional housing, but challenges remain in funding, coordination among service providers, and reluctance to expand services.

3. **Economic Growth and Development:** Economic growth strategies include cluster studies, fostering emerging industries such as aerospace, and developing tourist clusters. Challenges include addressing code enforcement issues, socio-economic flight from the city, and creating infrastructure to support new businesses and residential growth.
4. **Infrastructure and Services:** Priorities include infrastructure improvements, annexation plans, and providing workforce housing and development opportunities. Challenges include upgrading infrastructure to support growth, coordination of city services with parcels, and balancing traditional trades with emerging industries.

12. School Districts

1. **Health and Behavioral Issues:** There's a lack of coordination and funding for addressing physical and mental health issues, particularly behavioral problems exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Trauma and multigenerational issues contribute to the complexity of student needs.
2. **Professional Development and Coordination:** Professional development programs aim to equip staff with skills to address mental health and behavioral issues. However, there's a lack of coordination between schools and county services, leading to challenges in addressing the needs of students and families effectively.
3. **Wraparound Support Services:** The community recognizes the need for wraparound services that extend beyond the school environment to support families, especially those facing challenges such as homelessness and substance abuse. However, there's a lack of funding and coordination for these services.
4. **Food and Shelter Support:** Initiatives like the backpack program and partnerships with food banks aim to provide food security for students and their families. However, transportation issues and housing insecurity present significant barriers to accessing these services for some families.
5. **Early Learning and Facilities:** There's a need for increased early learning centers and improved facilities to support the education and well-being of children. Lack of affordable housing and quality housing options also affect the ability to attract and retain teachers and staff.
6. **Community Collaboration and Partnerships:** Building regular relationships and coordinating services between schools and existing service providers is crucial. Untapped partnerships and grant opportunities could help address the diverse needs of the community more effectively.

13. Squaxin Island Tribe:

An invitation was sent to a total of four tribes, the Squaxin Island Tribe, Quinault Tribe, Chehalis Tribe, and the Skokomish tribe but were only able to get a response from the Squaxin Tribe and discussed several topics.

1. **Memorandum of Agreement:** There's an existing memorandum of agreement between the tribe and the county, particularly concerning wells and water use in the comprehensive plan.

Both parties aim to support residential and economic growth while addressing service-related and infrastructure expenses.

2. **Watershed, UGA, and Tribal Properties:** Early discussions involve the Hood Canal and Chehalis watersheds, potential UGA amendments, and accurate depiction of tribal properties in the comprehensive plan update. Preservation of salmon habitat and collaboration with Tribal Water Resources are emphasized.
3. **Annexation and Environmental Impact:** Annexation discussions include environmental concerns such as water pollution and the need for strict standards to protect fisheries. Stakeholder engagement is vital for proposed UGA amendments.
4. **Wastewater Management System Improvements:** Potential improvements to the wastewater management system and the use of reclaimed water for irrigation are being discussed, with positive communication between the county and Shelton.
5. **Tribal Rights, Resources, and Planning Processes:** Discussions cover tribal interests, treaty rights, watershed restoration planning, and the incorporation of agreements into the comprehensive plan.
6. **Future Wells and Land Use Projections:** Projections for future wells and their impact on land use are being considered, along with a recent memorandum agreement on rural well development.
7. **Reclaimed Water Offset Projects in Shelton:** The tribe expects the county to initiate offset projects to mitigate rural development impacts, with the city's reclaimed water project being significant for the next two decades.

Impacts to County-wide planning policies and goals

Stakeholder interviews play a crucial role in the update of county-wide planning policies by providing valuable insights, perspectives, and feedback from individuals and groups directly affected by the policies. The information gathered from stakeholder interviews is carefully analyzed to identify common themes, trends, and, at time, areas of consensus or disagreement. This analysis helps inform the revision or development of the county-wide planning policies to address key concerns and incorporate stakeholder input. This ensures that the updated policies reflect the needs, interests, and priorities of the community.

SCJ's next step in the update process will include combing through the existing goals and policies to find opportunities to enhance the language, additionally, we will consider comments from the PAC during the first revision step.

Discussion Questions:

1. What key themes do you think are the most important to consider in the update process?
 - a. What additional information about this do we need to know?
2. What theme, idea, or area is not included here that you think is crucial to consider for the county-wide planning goals and policies?

Climate Resiliency Planning

Mason County was awarded grant funding from the Department of Commerce to conduct a Climate Resiliency planning effort, integrating the 2023 Hazard Mitigation Plan into this new (required) element of the Comprehensive Plan. The effort will produce the Climate Resiliency Element. The Climate Planning effort will be completed by June 2025.

What is Hazard Mitigation Planning?

Hazard mitigation planning encourages the development of a long-term mitigation strategy which then contributes to resiliency planning by identify risks that hazards pose for assets. Hazard Mitigation Planning develops policies before a disaster occurs. This helps to lessens the impacts to people and property and makes it easier to recover from hazard events.

Local governments must prepare a natural hazard mitigation plan (hazard mitigation plan) and update it every five years to be eligible for certain types of non-emergency disaster assistance, including grants to mitigate floods. Such plans must undergo review by the Washington Military Department's Emergency Management Division and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). FEMA will grant approval of a hazard mitigation plan if it meets minimum federal requirements. Once approved, the hazard mitigation plan provides eligibility for certain FEMA grants.

What is Climate Resiliency?

Climate resilience is the ongoing process of anticipating, preparing for, and adapting to changes in climate and minimizing negative impacts to our natural systems, infrastructure, and communities. Washington's cities and counties can build climate resilience by implementing a mix of preparedness, response, and recovery policies, including mitigating natural hazards, adapting to unavoidable impacts, and restoring degraded natural areas that provide key ecosystem services.

What is the purpose of Climate Resiliency?

The purpose of the Climate Resiliency Element is to identify and prepare for natural hazards that may be exacerbated by climate changes, including floods, droughts, wildfires, and other impacts of changes to temperature and precipitation patterns. The element will integrate the Mason County Hazard Mitigation Plan into the newly created Element for consistency.

Next Steps

Currently, SCJ and Mason County are in the process of identifying the internal team and the Climate Planning Advisory Committee (CPAT). The purpose of the CPAT is to engage the broader community, and focuses on updates or creation of the climate goals and policies. The CPAT will coordinate with the internal project team and public engagement efforts associated with updating housing, land use, transportation, and other comprehensive plan elements. The main focus of the CPAT is to analyze climate information gathered through periodic update engagement processes and provide recommendations on areas of focus.

Following the formation of the internal and external teams the steps provided below will be addressed by these teams over the coming months and the findings will be shared with the public through the public engagement

process. Each of these items are discussed in further details described in the Department of Commerce Climate Planning Guidance.

Explore Climate Impacts

- Identify community assets
- Explore hazards and changes in the climate
- Pair assets and hazards and describe exposure and consequences
- Identify priority climate hazards

Audit Plans and Policies

- Review existing Comprehensive Plan and Hazard Mitigation Plan for climate gaps and opportunities

Assess Vulnerability and Risk

- Assess sensitivity of community assets
- Assess adaptive capacity of community assets
- Characterize vulnerability of community assets
- Characterize risk of community assets (for medium/high vulnerability assets)
- Decide course of action

As these areas of Climate Planning are being addressed we will provide an overview of the public engagement plan and events which will coincide with events for the Comprehensive Plan.

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you think are the greatest areas of concern when it comes to climate planning?
2. What community assets are of the greatest importance for Mason County?

Update on the City of Shelton Comprehensive Plan Update