

# Comprehensive Plan Update: Stakeholder Interview Summary

Mason County, Washington

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# 1. Introduction

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 table 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 is included at the end of this document. Subsequent sections summarize topics and issues discussed, a summary section including directive concepts, and select quotes from interviewees.

## 2. Interviewees

This series of six group interviews introduces the Comprehensive Plan Update process, provides context for why the plan is being updated and known areas of interest in Mason County. We will share known issues, needs, and opportunities. The questions are meant to be conversational and will flow in a way that is natural or where the conversation leads us. Meeting dates, locations, and the number of attendees is provided following:

**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

Interviewee	Affiliation	Interview date
Sheila Corson	PUD	2.22.24
Kristin Masteller	PUD	2.22.24
Dale Webb	Belfair Water District	2.22.24
Lynda Links	League of Women Voters	2.22.24

Nancy Synder	League of Women Voters	2.22.24
Peggy Morell	League of Women Voters	2.22.24
Francesca Ritson	League of Women Voters	2.22.24
Amy Davis	League of Women Voters	2.22.24
Randy Lewis	League of Women Voters	2.22.24
Wendy Smith	Port of Shelton, exec director	2.22.24
Brandon Palmer	Port of Shelton, engineering manager	2.22.24
Marian Berejikian	WDFW, HQ, land use conservation and policy planner, Regions 4 and 6	2.22.24
Kara Whittaker	WDFW, habitat HQ, land use and conservation policy section	2.22.24
Jessica Bryant	WDFW, regional land use planner	2.22.24
Elliott	WDFW, assistant regional habitat program manager, Olympia office	2.22.24
Amy Spoon	WDFW, assistant regional habitat program manager, Montesano office	2.22.24
George M	WSDOT, multimodal planning manager	2.22.24
Genevieve Rigler	WSDOT, Olympic region multimodal planning office, transportation planner	2.22.24
Gwen Lentes	WDFW, regional habitat program manager Region 6	2.22.24
Jeff Davis	Pioneer School District	2.21.24
Wyeth Jessee	Shelton School District	2.21.24
Matt Mallery	Mary M. Knight School District	2.22.24
Mark Zeigler	City Manager	3.01.24
Jae Hill	Planning Director	3.01.24
Jeff Snyder	Central Mason	3.01.24
Beau Bakken	North Mason	2.23.22
Greg Rudolph	South Mason Fire District	02.23.22
Randy Collins	Mason County Fire Marshall	02.23.22
Karin Leaf	Economic Development of Council of Mason County	2.21.24
Rod Olsen	North Mason Chamber	2.21.24
Diedre Peterson	Shelton Mason Chamber	3.01.24
Erica Marbet	Squaxin Island Tribe	3.14.24

### 3. Methodology

This Stakeholder Interview Summary includes key findings from the six group interviews. Data collected during these interviews is primarily qualitative. SCJ Consulting conducted inductive theme analysis to summarize ideas and responses. The interview was conducted as a group with several different organizations identified by the county. The results from these interviews are summarized as follows.

# 4. Group Interviews Summary

## Topics & Issues

To protect individual perspectives and open participation, we have summarized conversations into themes and topics to inform this planning effort. Conversations with interviewees brought up multiple topics, categorized as housing needs, current conditions, or barriers to achieving affordable housing development. Many of these were detailed as issues or challenges that must be addressed as long-term solutions. The following section lists and summarizes these, including suggestions offered by interviewees.

### Fire District

**Partnering Strategic Planning and Facilities Plan:** Addressing the need for more space and potentially partnering with law enforcement, dispatch, and public works is crucial for efficient operations. Exploring a multiuse facility or safety facility could be a smart move for optimizing resources.

**Growth Disparities with Squaxin Tribe:** Coordinating with the county to plan for services and managing cultural differences are key. Strengthening the relationship while addressing impacts on both sides is vital for sustainable growth.

**Public Health Coordination in North Mason:** Success in upstream prevention work is encouraging. Continued collaboration on mental health initiatives and addressing opium use/abuse is essential for maintaining progress.

**Regional Collaboration and Consolidation:** Efforts to consolidate fire districts can improve efficiency and resource allocation. Exploring opportunities for regionalization and collaboration can lead to more effective emergency services.

**Managing Growth in North County:** As the area grows, addressing changes in appearance, commercial base, and fire services is necessary. Ensuring infrastructure development keeps pace with growth is crucial for maintaining economic activity.

**Facilities and Equipment Maintenance:** Investing in facilities like fire stations and training facilities is essential. Collaborating with the county and exploring public-private partnerships can help overcome staffing and maintenance challenges.

**Revenue Generation and Impact Fees:** Exploring impact fees and ensuring that growth pays for itself is important. Lack of consideration for cumulative impacts needs to be addressed to sustainably manage growth.

**Coordination with Tribe and Operations:** Improving coordination with the tribe and addressing staffing and equipment needs are critical for effective emergency response. Streamlining operations and enhancing outreach can improve community resilience.

**Staffing Challenges:** Addressing staffing shortages and competing with neighboring counties for talent is crucial. Investing in training and competitive salary packages can help attract and retain personnel.

**Housing Affordability:** Addressing housing affordability issues is important for retaining local talent and fostering community roots. Collaboration with educational institutions and outreach efforts can help address workforce challenges.

**Transportation Infrastructure:** Addressing transportation infrastructure needs is crucial for managing growth and reducing gridlock. Streamlining processes

## Ports, WSDOT & WDFW

### Port of Shelton

**Sanderson Field Airport:** Updating the airport masterplan is crucial for long-term development. Incorporating airport plans into broader county planning ensures coordination and maximizes benefits. Addressing endangered species concerns is essential to maintain environmental balance while pursuing development.

**Johns Prairie Industrial Park:** Transforming former industrial areas for lighter industrial uses aligns with sustainable development goals. Balancing economic growth with environmental conservation is key, especially concerning habitat protection and endangered species.

### WDFW

**Local Habitat Biologists:** Collaborate closely with Habitat Conservation Plans (HPAs) to ensure the best available science is applied to prioritize habitat and species lists.

**Policy Engagement:** Historically, there hasn't been much involvement in policy matters, but there's a renewed focus on salmon recovery at the WRIA scale and habitat connectivity.

**Climate Resilience:** Efforts are made to support climate resilience, including assisting other state agencies in writing guidance and rulemaking.

**Fish Passage:** Given top priority, with a significant program in Mason County, although its linkage to the Comprehensive Plan may be limited.

**Infrastructure Projects:** Includes the Belfair Bypass, which is awaiting funding approval, and attention to US101 for operational integrity due to growth in South Mason County.

**Land Use Planning:** Emphasis on climate element and SEPA streamlining, particularly related to middle housing, and transportation safety for vulnerable road users.

**Economic Development:** Potential projects from Commerce could drive job growth, including runway extensions and expansion of electrical lines.

**Environmental Conservation:** Focus on concentrated growth to minimize urban sprawl, limit development in marine areas, and increase buffer sizes to address impacts on waterways.

**Transportation and Land Use Integration:** Local growth funding addresses impacts on the transportation system, with a focus on growth allocation and potential urban growth area (UGA) expansion.

**Habitat Connectivity:** Prioritizing increased habitat connectivity for wildlife movement and carefully considering infill in UGA amendments.

**Open Space Opportunities:** Utilizing Transferable Development Rights (TDRs), incentivizing low density in habitat corridors, and potential support from agencies like WDFW in mapping corridors.

## School Districts

**Coordination and Funding Challenges:** There's a lack of coordination among existing services, particularly in mental health, and insufficient funding, leading to issues like the absence of residential placements and overwhelmed state services.

**Growing Behavioral and Trauma Issues:** Behavioral issues, including defiance and noncompliance, have become more pronounced, exacerbated by trauma, often multigenerational. The lack of resources and funding is hindering effective intervention.

**Professional Development:** Efforts are underway for staff professional development, with programs dealing with mental health, harassment, bullying, etc. However, local coordination between schools and county services is lacking.

**Wraparound Services:** There's a need for wraparound services that address family needs, not just children's needs, with many families hesitant to discuss home situations.

**Food and Shelter Programs:** Initiatives like the backpack program and cabinet program provide nonperishable food items to students and families in need, but there are concerns about the program's effectiveness and sustainability.

**Community Outreach:** Efforts include outreach to marginalized populations like the Guatemalan community and providing funds for students' essential needs like shoes and clothes.

**Housing and Transportation Challenges:** Housing is a significant issue, with many families facing homelessness, and transportation barriers often complicate access to services, particularly for homeless students.

**Early Learning and Facility Needs:** There's a need to increase early learning centers and improve facilities to better serve working families and address housing insecurity.

**Coordination and Partnerships:** There's a call for better coordination among service providers, tapping into untapped partnerships, and establishing regular relationships between the school district and service providers.

**Talent Attraction and Retention:** Lack of available housing and poor housing quality make it difficult to attract and retain talent, affecting the community's ability to address these challenges effectively.

## Mason County Public Utilities, Belfair Water Districts & League of Women Voter

**Climate Considerations in Public Engagement:** The 2023 law requiring climate considerations in local government plans was not included in guiding questions for public engagement sessions, highlighting the need for climate measures in comprehensive planning.

**Regional Development and Infrastructure:** Future plans include new substations and expanded electrical and broadband infrastructure. Challenges include transportation, school capacity, and infrastructure access in rural Mason County, particularly the lack of a municipal water system.

**Public Utility Districts and Comprehensive Planning:** The role of public utility districts in business support and the need for comprehensive planning for water supply were discussed. Compliance with House Bill 1181 to improve climate change responses through updated planning frameworks is necessary.

**Housing Development and Preservation:** Emphasis on a balanced mix of affordable and larger homes, development near major arterials, and preserving natural areas with walking paths for better access to shopping.

**Transportation and Health in Rural Shelton:** The need for a dial-ride service due to limited transportation options, septic system issues impacting health, and improved transportation for those unable to drive were key concerns.

**Disaster Mitigation and Communication:** Progress in disaster mitigation includes a FEMA-approved hazard mitigation plan and climate-resilient infrastructure updates. Better communication and collaboration among agencies, nonprofits, and the public are needed.

**Affordable Housing, Environment, and Education:** Concerns over housing affordability affecting the younger workforce, environmental impacts of logging on water flow and the shellfish industry, and the need for school districts to plan for more students from new housing developments. Energy efficiency in school buildings was also highlighted.

## City of Shelton & Chamber of Commerce

**Coordination Improvements:** While staff-level coordination has improved, there's still work to be done at the elected level, impacting progress. Efforts are made towards more effective Urban Growth Area (UGA) planning, especially in utilities, infrastructure, and land use.

**UGA Expansion and Pace of Growth:** Recent annexations and UGA expansions have occurred, but the pace of growth has been fairly slow, with uncertainty about projected population increases.

**Housing Challenges:** Affordability is a significant issue, with a lack of housing stock contributing to increasing homelessness. Efforts to establish workforce housing projects have faced challenges, including lack of builder interest and council support.

**Service Providers and Homelessness:** There's a need for transitional housing and emergency shelter space, with challenges in expanding services due to territorialism among service providers and reluctance to look beyond existing funding sources.

**Priorities:** Focus areas include housing stock diversification, job centers, infrastructure improvements, and enhancing quality of life amenities. Coordination between County, City, and Port of Shelton is emphasized for orderly growth within the UGA.

**Annexation Challenges:** Resistance to annexation is observed, particularly in areas like Island Lake and Southeast, despite future needs for infrastructure expansion.

**Economic Growth:** Efforts are made to foster economic growth, including cluster studies, organic industry growth, and potential emerging clusters like aerospace. There's a desire to develop tourist clusters but a need for critical components like convention space and branded hotels.

**Socioeconomic Issues:** Challenges include socioeconomic flight from the city, code enforcement issues, homelessness, and drug-related problems.

**Desired Economic Clusters:** There's interest in developing various economic clusters, including motorsports, casinos, and water access, with a push-pull dynamic between residential growth and service needs.



## Chamber of Commerce

**Infrastructure Improvements:** The Chamber prioritizes infrastructure enhancements to support economic growth and connectivity, including better access to City services for parcels and addressing challenges with septic systems.

**Annexation Plans:** Annexation plans are seen as crucial for expanding the City's boundaries and accommodating growth, but challenges exist, particularly for properties still reliant on septic systems and facing high costs for upgrades.

**Attracting New Businesses:** Creating opportunities for new businesses to establish themselves in the community is a focus. This includes promoting workforce housing and development opportunities, as well as changing the narrative to emphasize creating opportunities for future generations to live and work locally.

**Workforce Development:** The Chamber aims to balance traditional trades with modern workforce development initiatives to support a diverse and skilled labor pool. Concentrating services within City limits raises questions about demographic impacts and the capacity for sustained growth.

**Challenges with Septic Systems:** Many properties are still reliant on septic systems, which can be costly to upgrade and maintain. This limits their potential for development and subdivision, highlighting the need for infrastructure availability, zoning adjustments, and considerations for lot size.

## Tribal - Squaxin Island Tribe

**County and Tribal Relations:** Emphasis was placed on aligning with the county's planning objectives, particularly regarding residential and economic growth, while addressing associated service and infrastructure needs. A memorandum of agreement between the tribe and the county concerning wells and water use in the comprehensive plan was highlighted.

**Watershed, UGA, and Tribal Properties:** Early interagency discussions on watershed management and potential amendments to Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) were noted. The accurate depiction of tribal properties in the comprehensive plan and preserving quality salmon habitat were discussed, along with sharing planning policies with Tribal Water Resources for review.

**Annexation and Environmental Impact:** Concerns about annexation's environmental impact, particularly on water resources and fishery streams like Johns Creek and Mill Creek, were raised. The need for strict standards to prevent pollution and further discussions with stakeholders about proposed urban growth amendments were stressed.

**Intergovernmental Meeting for UGA Amendment Concerns:** A proposal for an intergovernmental meeting to address concerns related to UGA amendments and improve water resource planning in Shelton was suggested.

**Wastewater Management System Improvements:** Potential improvements to the wastewater management system in the Union area were discussed, including using reclaimed water for irrigation at the Alderbrook golf course. Positive collaboration with Shelton regarding wastewater and drinking water management was acknowledged.

**Tribal Rights, Resources, and Planning Processes:** Dialogue focused on tribal interests, treaty rights, and amendments to the UGA agreement, emphasizing the importance of shared resources and protecting them.

Discussions also included participation in planning processes like WRIA 14 and incorporating agreements into comprehensive plans.

**Future Wells and Land Use Projections:** Forecasts for future wells over the next 20 years and their impact on land use were discussed, along with a recent memorandum agreement between the tribe and the county regarding rural well development.

**Reclaimed Water Offset Projects in Shelton:** Expectations for the county to sponsor future offset projects to mitigate rural development impacts were expressed, with the city's reclaimed water project being significant for the next two decades.