

WCA Climate Element Comments

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Whidbey Climate ACTION endorses and stands ready to support implementation of the Climate Element. The following comments convey our concerns with the climate element, and highlight options for collaboration and implementation.

Comments

Include GHG Reduction Goals

A 14th goal was added to our State Growth Management Act (GMA) to address climate change and resiliency by adoption of House Bill 1181. Consequently the GMA now requires local comprehensive plans to have two subelements

1. climate resilience
2. greenhouse gas emissions reduction

The Resilience sub-element, with goals and policies to improve climate preparedness, response and recovery efforts, is mandatory for all fully planning counties and cities under the GMA. This Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emission sub-element, with goals and policies to reduce GHG emissions, is mandatory for the state's 11 largest counties.

Island County was able to opt out of the GHG reduction element because our population was just short of the cutoff. However, all jurisdictions were **encouraged** to make plans to address GHG reduction. Island County should add a goal to reduce GHG emissions from transportation and building heating systems, at a minimum, and then take steps to reduce such emissions.

Measuring and managing Island County's GHG emissions could be easily accomplished by tracking and taking steps to reduce IC expenditures for electricity, propane, gas and diesel. In fact, the State Dept of Commerce has prepared a tool to accomplish this objective. It can be found [here](#). This page provides policy tools to help Washington counties and cities measure and manage their greenhouse gas emissions and build resilience to wildfires, floods, and other natural hazards exacerbated by climate change.

Generic Population Projections are Inadequate

The Comprehensive Plan overall adopts the middle Washington state projection for Island County population growth. Examining the Washington state population projection web site quickly reveals two flaws.

1. The projections are made by economists projecting economics from historical records and standard economic growth projections. No mention is made of system instability due

to climate change. There is no mention of climate change being a contributing factor in their projection.

2. The same techniques are applied to Eastern and Western Washington. Climate effects are projected differently for Eastern Washington (more heat, increased fires, more serious drought effects) than for Western Washington (cooler climate can absorb projected heat increases, rainfall constant with perhaps more variability).

In *On the Move: The Overheating Earth and the Uprooting of America*, 2024, Abraham Lustgarten reports population migration data projections which show massive population shifts worldwide as well as within the United States. He writes that the models projecting migration show that within the United States alone 55 million people will move due to climate change by 2070. Notable portions of that change will occur in the next 10 to 20 years. The prime targets of the migration are identified as the Great Lakes area and the Pacific Northwest, west of the Cascades. Consequently, conservative population estimates are, in our area, suspect. Migration poses a significant planning consideration and is not mentioned in the Climate Element of the county plan.

The housing section of the Comprehensive plan projects 7,176 new dwelling units needed in the next 20 years. The rate of housing completions is stated at 258 per year, or 5,160 in 20 years, a shortfall of over 2,000 units. If migration to our area increases demand, the housing shortfall increases even more. Given the importance of housing costs to the Island economy, any increase in population beyond projections will exacerbate our challenge.

Generic Hazards Fail to Instill Urgency

The priority climate hazards list includes reduced snowpack. That holds for North Whidbey and Camano, however, South Whidbey uses sole source aquifers for water which depend on rainfall rather than snow pack. Differentiation should be stated in the plan where appropriate. Sea level rise is projected by NOAA to be between .5 and 1 meter at Port Townsend in 2100. Given that level, what are the sea level threats? What are potential mitigations, if any? And how does the county see its obligation to current coastline property owners? Vague handwaving at potential, identifiable problems is not a plan. Lack of specificity is a way of kicking the can further down the road.

Overall, more detail in the Climate Element would lend a greater sense of urgency. Changes are coming and we will need to respond. Saying what changes will specifically be projected will raise the chance of appropriate responses. Otherwise, research shows that status quo bias and short time horizons will lead most people to do nothing. The County needs to be a strong leader for the community. Moving off generic climate statements is a necessary step. Our response to climate change is long overdue and performative statements are an empty promise of solution to the crisis facing us.

WCA Support for Climate Plan Goals

Whidbey Climate ACTION endorses the following goals and policies and welcomes the chance to collaborate with the County in implementation and tracking.

Goal 1: Increase Climate Literacy WCA will fully support this through our website, Island Conversations, and annual conferences.

CL 1.3 Communicate in accurate and effective ways WCA strives to do this. We encourage the County to show how climate change poses a material, manageable, local, affordable, building challenge.

Goal 2: Protect undeveloped Coastal Ecosystems We should protect ***all*** coastal ecosystems. We will be watching for teeth in this goal, such as the enforcement of the prohibition on hard armoring.

Goal 3: Establish land use patterns to increase resilience

CL 3.4: Identify and protect forest and agricultural land from being further developed. We strongly support WEAN's comments on reform of our PBRS to give more benefits for preservation of forest habitat and carbon sinks.

Goal 5: Transportation Resilience

We appreciate the focus on public, shared transportation that will reduce vehicle miles traveled while improving mobility.

CL 5.2 Improve street connectivity and walkability including trails. We want to see the Bridge to Boat trail! In general, off-street trails provide multiple benefits: improved health, options for emergency evacuation, increased tourism attractions, and lower transportation carbon footprint.

Goal 6: Protect and restore wetlands, etc.

CL 6.3: Increase water residence on the landscape. Whidbey Climate ACTION is working to develop a rain garden program with Sound Water Stewards and allies. We look forward to coordinating with the County in this.

Goal 7: Emergency Preparedness

CL 7.2 Update Community Wildfire Protection Plan. This plan is part of the County's Hazard Mitigation Plan, last published in 2020. We look forward to the publication of the next HMP, in keeping with the five year cycle of updates. We expect that the next plan will be more attuned to the risks of increasingly hot/dry/windy summers ahead of us, rather than looking to the past, in light of increasingly extreme wildfire impacts (e.g. the Lytton, Canada fire, Pacific Palisades/Eaton fires, Lahaina fire)

Goal 8: Use the local conservation district to ensure the local ag economy is resilient. We concur that partnering with local farming educators, both the WSU Extension Service and Whidbey Island Conservation District, will deliver best results tailored to our unique circumstances, as ARCIC has recommended.

Goal 9: Site buildings and infrastructure in ways that are resilient

CL 9.1 Require residents and commercial entities to reduce and treat stormwater runoff. Again, when we have our rain garden volunteer brigade, we look forward to being a resource for the County, Cities, residents and businesses to install natural solutions to treat local stormwater runoff.

Goal 10: Protect Community Health

10.10 Provide overburdened communities with information and assistance to offset potential cost increases of switching to non fossil fuels. Framing climate action in terms of cost increases is pejorative and deadly. “Cost increases” scare people into passivity. Solar and wind are currently the least expensive energy sources. We support this goal but it should be framed as “upfront costs,” not “cost increases.” We encourage collaboration with State HEAR and CEEP programs such as the Kicking Gas program, and also support helping residents make the switch to electric vehicles through expanded charging station infrastructure.