

City of Sumas

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

2024 Update

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1 Introduction

In 1990, the Washington State Legislature passed the Growth Management Act, which served to provide cities and counties with the tools and regulations that they need to plan for their community's future in an effective and cohesive manner. A major tool that the Legislature provided was the requirement that cities create and periodically update a Comprehensive Plan, designed to project a city's population, employment, and other metrics, and to develop goals and policies for the City to follow to be able to accommodate those projections.

A major section of the Comprehensive Plan Update process, outlined in RCW 36.70A.140 "Comprehensive Plans – Ensure Public Participation" is to include the public early on in the process to help make decisions that ultimately effect their community. The requirements of the Public Participation Program are as follows:

"Each county and city that is required or chooses to plan under RCW 36.70A.040 shall establish and broadly disseminate to the public a public participation program identifying procedures providing for early and continuous public participation in the development and amendment of comprehensive land use plans and development regulations implementing such plans. The procedures shall provide for broad dissemination of proposals and alternatives, opportunity for written comments, public meetings after effective notice, provision for open discussion, communication programs, information services, and consideration of and response to public comments. In enacting legislation in response to the board's decision pursuant to RCW 36.70A.300 declaring part or all of a comprehensive plan or development regulation invalid, the county or city shall provide for public participation that is appropriate and effective under the circumstances presented by the board's order. Errors in exact compliance with the established program and procedures shall not render the comprehensive land use plan or development regulations invalid if the spirit of the program and procedures is observed."

To accomplish this policy of the Growth Management Act, the City of Sumas has developed this Public Participation Plan in preparation for the 2025 Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update. This plan will allow the City to ensure that citizens are heard and their dreams and concerns for the future of Sumas are possibly addressed in the Comprehensive Plan.

This Public Participation Plan outlines the approach that the City will take to ensure a clear process for each issue so residents can easily determine how best to get involved in the issues that they care about the most.

To meet Public Participation Plan objectives consistent with GMA goals, this document:

- Outlines Sumas' history of public participation in the comprehensive planning process;
- Identifies the potential participants in the comprehensive planning process, and;
- States the approach that will be taken with each issue.

2 Background and History

This chapter will serve to outline the history of public participation in the comprehensive planning process since the adoption of the Growth Management Act in 1990. Specifically, as it pertains to Sumas' first comprehensive plan passed in 1995.

2.1 1992 Community Survey

Sumas' first Comprehensive Plan was adopted in mid-1995, following a 3-year-long effort that identified a series of goals and policies for the City to work towards. Those goals and policies were identified based on data recorded from a community survey which was distributed in July of 1992. The 1992 Community Survey featured a series of both multiple-choice and short answer questions designed to identify aspects of Sumas that residents thought were beneficial and others that residents thought were detrimental to comfortable and safe living in Sumas.

While the multiple-choice answers provided good numerical data for the 1995 Comprehensive Plan to work with, the written-in short answer questions gave residents the opportunity to provide their true thoughts on Sumas, what they liked and what they didn't like, in their own words. The responses that people provided for these questions varied quite heavily in their scope and views. A pattern did begin to emerge among different respondents in that there was a heavy emphasis on uncertainty towards the inclusion of businesses in Sumas that primarily catered to Canadian visitors.

The following graphic provides respondents' written answers for the 1992 Community Survey. These answers show a clear division in the community of the time between those who were in favor of the expansion of businesses in Sumas and those who wanted to keep the small town feel that attracting these businesses would lose:

Get rid of the service stations and bars and stop catering to the needs of business only.

I think the city is more concerned with the Canadian business owners than with its own citizens.

I preferred the old character of Sumas, businesses closed on Sunday and not all Canadian owned businesses -- I feel the average resident is worse off now than 15 years ago, with traffic pollution, and noise.

Fewer gas stations.

City revenue dollars -- long-term businesses create better paying jobs which in turn offer the opportunity for local youth to stay and work and prosper in their own hometown. Right now you have to look outside Sumas for good job opportunities.

As far as I see it, Sumas is right now nothing more than a gate. We have this huge fenced back yard with nothing in it to play with. If the city continues to restrict business growth, you may as well start making out a rent check to Lynden. There must be thousands of lost dollars going through Sumas to Lynden, Everson and Bellingham every day. Until this city decides

Don't let grocery stores and gas stations go beyond Cherry Street.

Try to think of Sumas and its residents, not just money and Canadians.

Sumas has been taken over by a foreign country and no longer exists as a small town. Small town services, businesses, etc., are gone. It no longer is a desirable place to live and raise a family. Pride in home maintenance is gone as more and more homes have absentee landlords. The Canadian dollar has not improved the average resident's life -- it has made it worse -- only the businessman profits! Zoning means nothing! HUD housing brings in more non-contributing residents.

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to get off its hand and make a positive step towards business growth it will remain nothing more than a passageway to other points that can offer people what they need.

Let's not miss the opportunity for growth. We have many commercial opportunities we should take advantage of, and then allow residential growth to follow. We should take advantage of people passing through to better our community further.

Would like to see a wider variety of businesses. I would rather spend money in my own community and support it rather than supporting another which I must do more than 50 percent of the time I need something.

Serious considerations towards a mall complex of some sort with a variety of shops, etc., so tax dollars can stay in Sumas and not head to Everson or Lynden.

Keep the natural beauty, but please allow some space for commercial development. I feel that the city is not actively interested in a strong, broad tax base and future.

What will be important for this updated community survey to establish is where there are clear differences and similarities between the thinking and feelings of respondents in 1992 and today. We expect recent flooding events may not change the feelings of most respondents but may shift the topic of conversation.

3 Stakeholders

This Public Participation Plan is designed to reach all audiences who may have an interest in Sumas, its future, or the Comprehensive Plan Update. It's designed to reach out to other groups who as of yet have not taken an interest or are inclined to participate in this process but who are encouraged to do so through this plan. In this chapter we will identify key groups in which participation is encouraged.

3.1 Residents

The participation of residents is vital to the Comprehensive Plan Update Process. After all, it is these residents who stand to inherit whatever changes in policy and/or development regulations are made through this process. Keeping the residents informed and encouraging their participation throughout the process is tantamount.

In order to keep the residents well-informed of the Comprehensive Plan Process, as well as any changes made to the Sumas Comprehensive Plan, this plan explains several methods of information dispersal and participation opportunities that the City will implement throughout the process. These methods are as follows:

- Public Survey
- Public Meetings
- Comprehensive Plan Update Webpage

3.2 Residents Outside City Limits

Although the Comprehensive Plan is solely regarding the areas of Sumas within city limits, many people who call Sumas home live outside these boundaries. Although they do not live in city limits, these people are still affected by the results of the Comprehensive Plan update and may want to learn more about what that entails and how they can get involved.

Getting word out to these residents may be more difficult as the City does not have the mailing addresses to mail informational material out to. The City will have to prioritize more online means of dispersing information; specifically, the use of Facebook to reach members of Sumas community groups.

3.3 Low-Income Communities

The City will also be identifying means of making sure that communities around Sumas who may not have the same amount of resources or ability to make their voices heard or to influence what happens in their community have the ability to do so through this Comprehensive Plan update process. This is a voice that has always had trouble making sure that the City meets their needs, so getting them involved in this Comprehensive Plan update process will help the City identify their long-term needs and goals.

3.4 Business Owners

Although Sumas' residents are integral to the Comprehensive Plan Update process, they are not the only ones who stand to be affected by the decisions made through this process. Those who own

businesses in Sumas can also be greatly impacted, and thus deserve a strong presence in this Comprehensive Plan Update process. Their input can be vital to chapters like the Economic Development Chapter which directly impacts the commercial aspects of Sumas. As part of our information dispersal methodology, the City will have a separate section of information which may be more related to the Economic Development side of the Comprehensive Plan Update and which may be more catered towards business owners. This group is also heavily encouraged to get involved in the process and to make sure that the voice of Sumas' businesses are heard as well.

3.5 Interested Property Owners and Developers

As part of the Comprehensive Plan Update Process, the County and Cities review projections for population, housing, and employment for the next twenty years. After the County reviews the projections, they work with the cities to decide on how much employment, housing, and employment should be allocated to each jurisdiction over the next twenty years. Once the allocations are made, it is up to the individual jurisdictions to plan and allow for the allocated growth in their community.

For this reason, it is important for interested property owners and developers to be involved in the Comprehensive Plan process as their participation in Sumas is what will allow this jurisdiction to meet those allocation targets. Keeping them informed in any shift in goals and policies, especially as it pertains to housing and economic development is vital. As well, this group is the most who will be impacted by changes to development regulations which, (due to recent State legislation) there are many. Another section of the information dispersal will be catered more towards this group.

3.6 Community Organizations

There are numerous organizations whose role is to serve this community on a quasi-governmental or non-governmental level are incredibly important to Sumas. This group comprises of schools, libraries, churches, service groups, advocacy groups, and others. This group would be most interested in the Capital Facilities and Housing elements of the comprehensive plan. Information which pertains to them will also be highlighted for their consumption.

3.7 Other stakeholders

Although the groups listed in previous sections are prioritized, the City encourages all kinds of participation in the Comprehensive Plan update process. While information for these groups will be more catered to them, all public information regarding the Comprehensive Plan will be posted to the City's website.

4 Public Survey

In the next several chapters this plan will explain in detail the various methods of public participation and information dispersal that the City will employ throughout this Comprehensive Plan Update. The first method to be discussed will be a public survey.

4.1 Survey Form

The Survey will first go live at the City's decision. The survey will stay live for 30 days. Once the survey has gone live, an announcement will be posted to the home page of the City's website, informing all interested parties who visit the website know that there is a survey, and where to find it. A copy of the survey will be provided as Appendix A to this plan.

The survey will be provided through three different mediums. The first medium is online. A digital link to the survey will be posted on the home page of the City's website. The survey will be on Google Forms and a QR Code will also be attached to an informational flyer sent out to all residents. There will also be a paper copy available that will not be sent out to all residents but will be available for pick up or mailed when requested. The survey is designed to give the City a general understanding of residents' feelings about the current state of Sumas, what the City has done well, and where it can improve. It is split up into three sections.

The first section is introductory and includes a few paragraphs on what a Comprehensive Plan is, the purpose of the survey, and some specifics about how the survey works. The questions in this section give the City a rough idea of the respondents' relationship to Sumas and how much they know or want to know about the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update process. It also asks if they would like to stay informed about the status of the Periodic Update process as the work continues.

Multiple choice questions will be compiled based on respondents' demographic information and the City will be able to cross-reference the respondent's answers in Section 3 with their answers in Section 2. The City can then use statistical analysis to generalize which respondents with certain demographics answered questions similarly. This will allow the City to get a well-rounded view of who are responding in Sumas and what they want to see. The Long Answer questions are less effective for statistical analysis but will give the respondent more room to elaborate on their answers and provide detailed feedback for the City to use.

4.2 Discussion

An anticipated challenge with the survey is that it intends to be an update to the survey made for the 1995 Comprehensive Plan, and yet there is no mention of the event that is the primary reason for the update, the 2021 flooding event. The reason that there aren't any questions related to flood resiliency in this survey is that, although flood resiliency is important to the community and the City, it is directed towards an event that has already occurred. A survey of this nature is meant to act more as a look to the future of the community. It will, however, inform people's responses as the community continues to move forward following the flood, and the event will play a role in informing decisions made in relation to the 2025 Comprehensive Plan.

Question 14, regarding a series of pictures showing small town main streets, is not meant to provide the City with any specific vision, but to help the City identify the type of feel for a main street the respondents are interested in. Options 1 and 3 of Question 14 are very similar in style of small town main street; however they differ in one less conspicuous detail: the infrastructure. While Option 3 includes a stoplight at the intersections, ornate street lighting, and a flare of urban foliage, Option 1 features a 4-way stop intersection, standard street lighting, and what appears to be a downtown park in the foreground. Both options are similar in style to Sumas, but finding the difference in detail that residents prefer is what makes this question so critical.

4.3 Evaluation

Once the survey has been live for 30 days, the City will take down all notification of the survey's existence and the evaluation will begin. Multiple choice answers will be compiled and broken down by demographics. This will let us know what people of similar demographics think about certain issues. Looking at the multiple choice answers in a broad sense will allow us to see what the City thinks as a whole about issues. Evaluation of the written answers will take longer but will allow the City to hear from residents directly. These answers will be more in depth and more specific to people's experience and can be more beneficial to the Comprehensive Plan Update Process as a whole. Once all the answers have been compiled and evaluated, the City will ensure that the goals and policies implemented in the Comprehensive Plan match the community's vision and ideas. If they do not, changes may be made accordingly.

On completion of the compilation of the survey results, the City will first hold a Planning Commission meeting in which the results will be reviewed, and then they will be released to the general public via the City's website for public consumption.

5 Public Meetings

Throughout the Comprehensive Plan Update Process, the City will engage in a variety of public meetings through both the Sumas City Council and Planning Commission. Although both City Council meetings and Planning Commission meetings are open to the public, picking which meetings to attend will also be vital to making successful comments that help the City determine which directions to pursue with this update.

5.1 Planning Commission

The Sumas Planning Commission is a volunteer group of five individuals who meet with the City Planning staff to discuss topics which will include the Comprehensive Plan Update. Although they have no official voting power, the Planning Commission does provide official recommendations to the City Council on whether to approve or deny proposals. The Planning Commission does hold public hearings when official decisions are to be made regarding key items of the Comprehensive Plan. Although all Planning Commission meetings are open to the public, these public hearings will be better advertised and more directed for general public involvement as official decisions will need to be made.

Planning Commissioners are members of the community who are appointed by the mayor, but who ultimately volunteer to be on the Commission because they have an interest in the planning side of the City. Many of these meetings involve relaxed discussions of the City's future. They are also more inclined towards a broad open discussion and can also be described as a brainstorming session.

While these meetings are not as official in that the Commissioners do not have voting power, residents who enjoy thinking of creative solutions to problems may prefer to be involved in these types of meetings. Planning Commissions are held on a general monthly basis although dates and times for future meetings are identified during Commission meetings. Some meetings may be considered public hearings and will be announced to the public in a more formal manner. For more information on Planning Commission meeting dates and times, please email ccortez@cityofsumas.com.

5.2 City Council

The Sumas City Council is a group of five elected officials who are the official decision-makers for the City. The City Council's meetings are open to the public, with an opportunity for public comment at various points throughout the meeting. On the occasion that official decisions regarding the Comprehensive Plan need to be made, the Council will hold public hearings, similar to those performed by the Planning Commission, which will be better advertised so as to invite as much public involvement as possible.

In a general sense, City Council meetings are semimonthly opportunities for City Staff to sit down with City Council and discuss Sumas issues that must be addressed. During the Comprehensive Plan Update Process, however, the City Council will also be making final decisions on the adoption of various aspects of the update and will be the ultimate deciders on approving the update in its entirety. Throughout this process, the City Council will take on more of a direct public advocacy role, encouraging their constituents to give them ideas and concerns about the city and things they would like to see

changed. Council members can then bring those concerns and ideas to Council meetings to make sure that everyone's voice is heard.

However, when issues related to the Comprehensive Plan Update come before the City Council, they have generally been worked on by City Staff, the City Attorney, and the Planning Commission. These are more final proposals that are before the City Council for final approval rather than open debate. While there is room in the Council Meetings for public comments, the best time to have those discussions would have been when the topic was being discussed during the Planning Commission meetings. Thus, even though the City Council meetings are where the decisions are made, it may be more fruitful for residents to get involved during the Planning Commission meetings.

6 Website

A Comprehensive Plan page has been added to the website which will provide residents with helpful resources for what a Comprehensive Plan Update is and how they can get involved. Publicly available documents will also be posted to this page as the process continues. This should work to help those who are interested in the periodic update process stay informed as to the City's progress. Also included on the Comprehensive Plan page is a link to the Planning Commission page where they can find the dates, time, and location of Planning Commission meetings related to the Comprehensive Plan Update process.

An announcement will be posted to the front page of the website when the community survey becomes active. This will announce the beginning of the public's involvement in the Comprehensive Plan Update process, include official notification of the existence of the Comprehensive Plan page, and information on how to get in contact with City Officials for more information on the Comprehensive Plan Update process.

7 Climate Change

In 2023, the Washington State Legislature passed House Bill (HB) 1181 which required cities and counties to include a Climate Change Resiliency sub-element into their comprehensive plans during the next update. Some cities of a larger size were required to include a sub-element about greenhouse gas emissions, of which Sumas does not apply. As part of this update, the City will be reviewing the ways in which the climate is affected by the City of Sumas and how decisions which are made during this update will impact the climate resiliency of this area. Participants should be encouraged to give their ideas for ways that Sumas can improve its climate resiliency, specifically as it has to do with greenhouse gas emissions and water system health.

7.1 Climate Change Tasks

As part of the comprehensive plan update process, the City will be completing extra tasks than what has been done in the past to ensure that the City meets the climate planning requirements as detailed in House Bill 1181. Below is an overview of the tasks that the City will undertake.

Task 1: Environmental Justice & Health Disparities Report. The City will be releasing a report detailing areas around Sumas which emit the most pollution.

Task 2: Local Emissions Trends and Projections Report. The City will be releasing a report detailing predictions for the amount of pollution levels in Sumas going as far into the future as 2045.

Task 3: Sumas Participation in the Whatcom County Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan Audit. Whatcom County has an existing Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan that has been in effect for a significant period of time. Now that the Washington State Legislature has passed House Bill 1181, the County will need to be audited to ensure that the Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan conforms with the requirements of the House Bill. This will also include sections of the Plan which involve Sumas. The City will have the ability to participate in that process.

Task 4: Draft Climate Hazard & Impact Assessment. The City will be assessing Sumas' risk for natural hazards such as floods, wildfires, sea level rise, landslides, droughts, heat, and smoke. Of course, a greater priority will be given to the section dedicated to flooding.

Task 5: Sumas Participation in the Whatcom Countywide Planning Policies Climate Review. As part of the Comprehensive Plan update process, Whatcom County and the cities within are reviewing our Countywide Planning Policies, a set of policies that the County and all the cities adopt and implement into our individual comprehensive plans. With the passing of HB 1181, some of those policies will need to be amended or added to conform with the bill's requirements.

Task 6: Comprehensive Plan Element Review. As part of our Comprehensive Plan update process, the City will be reviewing all of the elements touched on in the Plan to ensure that they all conform with the requirements of HB 1181. This includes a potentially newly developed Environment element.

Tasks 7 and 8: Environmental Impact Statement Climate Sections. As part of the Comprehensive Plan update process, the County and cities will be conducting an environmental impact assessment of our Comprehensive Plans to review how and to what extent the plans would impact the environment if fully implemented.

Task 9: Comprehensive Plan Policies Review. A Comprehensive Plan includes a number of policies developed for each element that the City will attempt to implement over the course of the life of the plan. The City will be reviewing these policies to ensure compliance with HB 1181.

Task 10: Adoption of Ordinance Addressing Climate in the Comprehensive Plan and Development Regulations. As a final step of the Comprehensive Plan update process, the City will adopt an ordinance which formally adopts the new Comprehensive Plan and all of the updates made therein. The City will also adopt an ordinance adopting all of the changes to the City's development regulations updated as part of the overall process. This Ordinance will also include language on how and why climate-related sections of the Comprehensive Plan and development regulations were adopted and implemented.

With House Bill 1181 requiring many changes be made to our Comprehensive Plan and to the update process, the City will be producing many documents and making changes, all of which will be for the benefit of Sumas. For this reason, the City welcomes public participation in all these tasks, with several of them requiring at least one public hearing to be fully implemented. Interested parties can look up the Comprehensive Plan page on the City's website to view these documents and to find out opportunities for the public to participate.

8 Conclusion

Although the Comprehensive Plan Updates are required by the State of Washington, they also pose an opportunity for the community to get involved in the future of Sumas which they are the most direct benefactors. By responding in the Community Survey and attending and participating in Planning Commission and City Council meetings, the residents of this community will have an opportunity to don their City Planner hats and participate in developing the Comprehensive Plan that will shape the future of the city.