

Anacortes Planning Commission Minutes - April 9, 2025

Roll Call

Chairperson Linda Martin called to order the Anacortes Planning Commission meeting of April 9, 2025 at 6:00 p.m. Commissioners Jim Stoneman, Frank Jeretzky, Paul Ryan, and Mike Mills were present. Commissioners Luke Currier and Will McCombs were absent. Jim Stoneman moved to excuse the absences of Commissioners Currier and McCombs. Frank Jeretzsky seconded. All ayes.

Pledge of Allegiance

Minutes

Minutes of 10/30/2024 were submitted for approval.

Jim Stoneman moved to approve the minutes as submitted. Paul Ryan seconded. All ayes.

Public Comment

Public Comment - Munce 4/4/25

No public comment received.

Public Hearings

Other Business

2025 Comprehensive Plan Update - New Draft Climate Element Goals & Policies

John Coleman introduced the presenters from Makers.

Katie Saunders said tonight's meeting is to review the Climate element draft goals and policies. The greenhouse gas (GHG) inventory will be the first part and Beth Miller will present this.

Beth Miller reviewed the minimum requirements for the greenhouse gas emission sub-element. The goal is to make sure everyone benefits from a reduction in GHG's. She reviewed the projections and the potential for reduction in Anacortes's projected emissions. The two potential improvement areas are switching from natural gas furnaces to electrical heat pumps and reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT). Anacortes is relatively low already, but there is room for improvement. She reviewed options to reduce the building and transportation energy. Some examples include increasing local renewables (i.e.: rooftop solar systems); supporting the use of renewable diesel and supporting EV infrastructure. The city can help make it easier for EV's by having chargers available for those that don't have them readily available at their residence. The target is to meet the state's requirement of net-zero emissions by 2050. The city is taking the lead by exploring opportunities for collaboration and partnerships.

Katie Saunders stated that regarding interim targets, there is no need to set these, but city staff thought there were some areas that they wanted guidance on. This can help with transition planning. She reviewed the 3 minimum requirements for the resilience sub-element. The city is required to have a goal and a policy for each climate-exacerbated hazard. She also mentioned that there is overlap between climate and the Shoreline Master Program (SMP), so that will be addressed when the SMP is updated. The Department of Ecology is finalizing guidance for the SMP update.

Linda Martin clarified that we are using the 2010 SMP. She asked when the update is due.

John Coleman pointed out that the city is working on the update. It's pretty much done, but put on hold due to some appeals. Staff will bring it back after the Comprehensive Plan is completed. The SMP will have a public review process.

Mike Mills asked if the minimum requirements are from HB 1181.

Katie Saunders agreed. She moved on to the local climate hazards: extreme heat, extreme precipitation, sea level rise, landslide, reduced snowpack/ drought, and wildfire/ wildfire smoke. There are additional nuances that need to be considered that we will discuss tonight. She reviewed the climate sectors and local assets.

She reviewed the key asset vulnerabilities for our community. The ACFL brings several benefits; such as,

emission reduction and additional buffers to ecosystems. The climate element can stand alone or be integrated into the other elements. The stand-alone option aligned best with the process Anacortes is going through. Cross-references can help with integration in the future updates to the Comprehensive Plan.

Ms. Saunders moved on to the process. They worked from measures identified by Commerce. Their team discussed priorities with the climate team to edit and make things fit for the entire community. They shared the draft list with staff and the climate team. They also took into account the feedback received at the open house from the community. The revised list is in tonight's packet. She reviewed the feedback from the open house. The highest votes were for the ecosystems (protecting and restoring streams and wetlands, and enhancing urban forests), promoting energy efficiency and small-scale renewable energy. We also heard support for incentivizing private development to promote green energy and sustainable design; and promoting local solar and small-scale renewable energy. She reviewed the additional feedback received.

Katie Saunders moved on to the draft list overview. There are 15 goals and 59 policies. Of those, 35 are high-priority measures from Commerce guidance. Anacortes is meeting all the minimum requirements for goals and policies. She provided a list of the co-benefits of climate goals and policies. In the list, they called out the sub-elements that are applicable to indicate the co-benefit. They also added a column to show if they are meeting the minimum requirements. The yellow-highlighted policies did not come from the Commerce requirements; rather, most were existing or came from the consultant team. She moved on to the environmental justice considerations for vulnerable populations. A key element was supporting and promoting affordable housing policies. There is potential for more significant health impacts for vulnerable communities and sensitive populations. Tribal communities experience cultural loss with climate impacts. They reviewed the Samish climate vulnerability assessment. Downtown and eastern portions of Anacortes have higher vulnerability based on location and types of housing in those areas.

Ms. Saunders moved on to the climate goals. She pointed out that CE 1.1 grew out of an existing policy and was expanded after bringing in guidance from Commerce. CE 1.2 discusses the need for coordination and partnerships.

Mike Mills commented that in CE 1 there is language for Anacortes to be a leader for the region. Given the limited resources, he wonders why that language is in here.

Katie Saunders clarified that is from the existing policy. They looked at what the city would need to do to retain this policy.

Linda Martin stated that CE 1.1a is redundant.

Ms. Saunders asked if the Planning Commission wants the guiding principles in volume one. The Commissioners agreed.

Katie Saunders moved on to CE 2, which touches on environmental justice for vulnerable populations. Jim Stoneman pointed out that "raise awareness" is used several times. He wonders if there is other language that can be used.

Katie Saunders continued with CE 2 stating this helps to understand the barriers to those populations. CE 3 focuses on working with local tribes to protect cultural resources and practices.

Linda Martin referenced CE 3.1, asking how we can enhance local ecosystems to meet tribal treaty rights. Katie Saunders gave the example of salmon restoration.

Commissioner Martin asked if there is a list of culturally relevant sites to accompany CE 3.3.

Katie Saunders clarified there is a story map that was completed with the Samish tribe. They also did a survey of culturally relevant sites.

Linda Martin commented that if we knew the relevant sites, that could impact zoning, building regulations, etc. If we don't know these sites and we try to make change, we would have to work with the tribe for each individual project to make a determination on this.

Ms. Saunders agreed that a list is a great idea. She reminded the Commissioners that we also need to be mindful of development in known areas, such as the shoreline, for cultural resources. She moved on to CE 4, which focuses on how we are meeting minimum requirement #2 for supporting ecosystem adaptations.

Mike Mills referenced section 4.1, suggesting the language be "climate change impacts, including sea level rise".

Linda Martin said CE 4.3 is cross-referred to Ecology, so it does not need to be in both places. She suggests adding a period after streams in section 4.4. The rest of that sentence seems to be addressing a different topic and could be moved to CE 5.1.

John Coleman said they are related. We want to protect the trees around streams and wetlands, but we also need to be fire-wise around houses. It's a balancing act that we're describing, which is why we are referencing it in both sections. This brings to light that these priorities are at odds with each other.

Jim Stoneman commented that he likes these because there is action to them. He wonders if the prior goals could follow this format.

Katie Saunders moved on to CE 5, which talks about growing the urban canopy broadly along with developing plans to reduce wildfire.

Linda Martin referenced section 5.4 and suggested changing to the language from the prior section.

Ms. Saunders pointed out that in section CE 6, energy resilience, most of these were identified by PSE. This section talks about coordination with PSE for the local grid.

Linda Martin said at the last meeting, she mentioned that storage facilities for batteries is a controversial topic. She feels that the citizens will not be agreeable to storage facilities for batteries. This needs to be discussed with the public and thought through.

Paul Ryan asked if the battery storage is based on fire concerns.

Katie Saunders stated that providing local storage helps with resiliency of the grid. This could be accomplished with a micro-grid solar panel installation. She understands that there may be larger facilities, but Anacortes could plan for smaller ones.

John Coleman clarified that we need to address rules for battery storage facilities. PSE is pushing for battery storage for grid stability. There may also be legislature moving in that direction. The scale of these needs to be addressed. We need to make sure there is enough power available when there is demand.

Linda Martin suggests looking at this entire section and reworking it. She wondered why this only addresses PSE and not all the local utilities.

Mike Mills expressed concern at the introduction of battery storage facilities. He moved on to down-lights for streetlights. He asked if that is addressed in the environmental section as pollution.

Katie Saunders agreed.

Linda Martin referenced CE 7 which states "and support energy system transitions to reduce GHG emissions from buildings". This is in opposition to initiative 2066.

Paul Ryan pointed out that the building associations are fighting this transition.

John Coleman stated this says promote, not end. The climate element leans towards electrification of homes for efficiency. This mainly means changing from gas furnaces to electric heat pumps.

Linda Martin disagreed with that interpretation.

Ms. Saunders said they will look at this again. She reviewed the two main sections in CE 7. The first addresses new buildings and the second addresses reducing emissions from existing buildings.

Linda Martin referenced section CE 7.5, which is the battery storage controversy.

Katie Saunders clarified that these are small-scale, such as solar panels.

Frank Jeretzky said he understands moving to efficiencies, but making those mandatory will increase development costs. This goes against the affordability issues we are also concerned about.

Katie Saunders stated this is more about existing buildings.

Frank Jeretzky pointed out he was talking about affordable housing, not low income. He expressed concern that making this mandatory will decrease affordability.

John Coleman said these changes provide longer term affordability of energy/utility bills. As the technology becomes more common, the costs come down too.

Paul Ryan commented that they are less efficient in colder weather.

Linda Martin said that's a point well taken. There are unintended consequences.

Katie Saunders stated she will look at ways to reword the language in CE 8 to better capture the overall goal. Section CE 9 is making sure development is located to increase resilience.

Linda Martin asked if CE 9.1 requires changing zoning.

Katie Saunders disagreed. This is to look at where to locate infrastructure.

Mike Mills referenced CE 9.4. When we invest in property, there is risk involved. He's not convinced that it's appropriate for the city to buy properties that become vulnerable to climate-exacerbated hazards.

Katie Saunders said this can be applied when the city purchases property and changes the use to open space. This is looked at on a case-by-case basis. She moved on to CE 10, stating that a lot of this is from the Department of Commerce guidance.

Linda Martin suggested adding the definition of active transportation.

Katie Saunders clarified that will be addressed in the transportation element. This connects to that element.

Several Commissioners agreed there needs to be a glossary of terms.

Linda Martin referenced CE 10.1, asking for a definition of form-based codes.

Katie Saunders gave the definition. She moved on to CE 11, which deals with transitioning to EV vehicles.

She then reviewed CE 12, 13, and 14 which deal with the economic impacts of a disaster. She pointed out that a lot of the work described in CE 15 is already happening.

Mike Mills pointed out that we use the word prioritize quite a bit. The existing plan has a table regarding implementation, but it doesn't have a process for prioritizing. The draft has almost 60 in this element. He expressed concern at being able to prioritize all of them.

Katie Saunders stated they will be identifying actionable items to shape the next steps.

Mike Mills commented that this is pervasive in all the elements. We will have to figure out how to prioritize these because our budget will not allow for all of them.

Katie Saunders said they will highlight the co-benefits to help with that prioritization.

Paul Ryan mentioned that at the beginning of the meeting we discussed switching from natural gas to electrical. He asked if the consultant's has those figures.

Beth Miller stated they don't have that information. They can review natural gas sales to customers, but it's hard to convert that to a number of homes.

Paul Ryan hopes that CNG will share that information. He expressed concern about the electrical capacity.

Beth Miller said PSE was firm that they have the capacity, which is why the PSE goals were included.

Katie Saunders clarified that we are not mandating switching to electrical from CNG.

John Coleman said we discussed capacity with PSE several times. This is not unique to Anacortes. They are working with the State to make sure this is attainable. He reminded the Commissioners that PSE is already starting to switch the grid to clean energy. He pointed out that we eliminated items from the environmental and conservation element and will be making those references.

2025 Comprehensive Plan Update - Draft Amendments to the Environment & Conservation Element Goals & Policies

John Coleman pointed out that these goals and policies already exist. No major changes were made; only small edits to make things clearer, more readable, and to be more consistent with other elements in the Comprehensive Plan. Many of these were moved to other elements and not stricken outright.

Mike Mills asked why we are acknowledging tribal governments in EC 1.2.

John Coleman said staff realized that was overlooked before, so we added it now. EC 2 was changed to shoreline resources to be more accurate.

Linda Martin referenced the new policy between 2.1 & 2.2 stating it is included in the climate element, so it's duplicative here.

John Coleman stated that one of the changes to the SMP is formatting. It will be changing from a stand-alone document to two separate documents. The first section, the goals & policies, will be moved to the Comprehensive Plan and the regulations will be moved to the AMC. The shoreline element of the Comprehensive Plan will be an outcome of the SMP update. He moved on to natural hazards in goal 3.

Linda Martin referenced section EC 3.2. She asked if "frequently flooded areas" are delineated similar to the 100-year flood plain.

John Coleman disagreed. Those are not mapped. Frequently flooded areas are usually locally known areas.

Linda Martin expressed concern about this being interpreted incorrectly.

John Coleman said that as far as shoreline goes, the 100-year flood plain may change due to sea level rise.

We don't know if this will apply to rivers. Groundwater flooding is different. Those are areas where the groundwater is higher than it used to be, usually due to underground changes.

Mike Mills pointed out that goal 3 has to do with natural hazards. He asked where non-natural hazards are addressed. He wondered if there's an emergency plan for things, such as, commercial, aviation, etc.

John Coleman clarified that airports have crash zones around them. The fire department is prepared for other non-natural hazards. The refineries have their own plans for incidents that occur. He moved on to EC4 and EC 5.

Linda Martin asked how "in perpetuity" will be achieved as referenced in EC 5.1.

John Coleman gave the examples of conservation easements or dedicated tracts. A NPGE has been used in the past to achieve this. He mentioned that there is one new policy in EC6.

Linda Martin pointed out that is also in CE 4. Her preference is to keep it here.

The Commissioners reviewed the rest of the goals & policies and had no comments.

Planning Department Update

John Coleman pointed out that staff intends to have a public hearing on these items at the next Planning Commission meeting on April 23, 2025. He reminded the Commissioners that tomorrow is the chamber lunch where the Mayor will update us on the state of the city.

Mike Mills asked for information on the June 6th North Star meeting.

John Coleman commented that all the jurisdictions in Skagit County are working together to identify housing, homelessness, mental health community service organizations that exist to better understand how they all work together. This symposium is an educational resource for all the different efforts going on. There are several tracts you can choose to attend.

Linda Martin pointed out that tickets are going quickly.

Mike Mills wondered if there is another City Council retreat planned yet. He found that very informative when he attended last year.

John Coleman suggested checking with Jennifer T.

Adjournment

Chairpersom Martin adjourned the meeting at 8:23 p.m.