Spokane County

Climate Element Policy Audit

May 27, 2025

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Introduction

Spokane County is developing a new Climate Element (CE) as part of the County 's 2026 Comprehensive Plan update. The CE will integrate climate resilience, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction, and equity goals and policies into the County 's long-term planning framework. The CE will build on commitments made in the County 's current Comprehensive Plan, Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan, Stormwater Management Plan and the Shoreline Master Program, to provide consistent, clear, and actionable guidance on climate resilience and GHG emissions reduction.

This memorandum identifies County's climate policy trends, gaps, and opportunities to guide development of CE goals, objectives, and policies. Results from this assessment will be utilized to ensure the CE is consistent with existing County initiatives and Washington state guidance and requirements.

Legislative Context & Background

The Washington Growth Management Act (GMA) was amended in 2023 under Washington House Bill (HB) 1181, requiring cities and counties to integrate climate policies[1] into comprehensive plan updates. For Spokane County, these required policy changes must reduce GHG emissions, address climate impacts, and increase resilience across local sectors.

The Washington State Department of Commerce (Commerce) led a multiyear effort to develop model climate element guidance[2], which provides steps and pathways to integrate a climate resilience sub-element into comprehensive plans, either as integrated policies or a standalone element. Jurisdictions are encouraged to assess their climate impacts and risks, seek input from key stakeholders and communities, and pursue pathways that modify existing and/or create new policies to increase community resilience. Spokane County's 2026 Comprehensive Plan update will incorporate a CE that is aligned with Commerce's guidance, bolsters existing County climate policies, and includes policies that foster sustainable and equitable planning in the face of climate change.

Spokane County's CE will identify specific actions the County can take to improve climate resilience, reduce GHG emissions, and promote equity across both. Commerce describes these three priorities as:

[1] Climate resilience policies are required for all jurisdictions planning under the GMA. GHG emission reduction policies are only required for 11 of the fastest growing counties and cities within them.
[2] Washington Department of Commerce. (2023). Climate Element Planning Guidance. Retrieved from https://deptofcommerce.app.box.com/s/bhqov8pvbiygss9jxbmtezzgzrtr7nal

- Climate Resilience: The ongoing process of anticipating, preparing for, and adapting to changes in climate and minimizing negative impacts to our natural systems, infrastructure, and communities per RCW 70A.65.010.
- GHG Emissions Reduction: Actions taken to reduce or eliminate the emissions of greenhouse gases (present and future) in order to reduce the rate and extent of climate hazards. It may also be referred to as greenhouse gas emissions GHG reduction per RCW 70A.65.010.
- Equity: In the context of this policy review, considers how well policies address the reduction of climate impacts that affect the environment and health of vulnerable communities also called overburdened communities per RCW 19.405.020.

Methodology

As part of this climate policy audit, Cascadia Consulting Group (Cascadia) reviewed a set of County key planning documents and developed a policy database that includes goals and policies from the County 's key planning documents. This database was used to filter climate focus areas, Commerce-identified priority sectors, and climate impacts to identify trends, gaps, and opportunities for policy inclusion in the CE. Cascadia and County staff worked together to identify documents to review (Table 1-Table 3).

The document review meets the Commerce requirements by including Core Comprehensive Planning Documents, as well as supplemental policy documents:

- Core Comprehensive Planning Documents: Cascadia completed a detailed review of the Comprehensive Plan, Hazard Mitigation Plan, and Shoreline Master Plan, identifying 189 policies related to commerce guidelines. These documents serve as the quantitative analysis for the gaps and opportunities assessment, as the Climate Element is intended to build on them and fill in any gaps from these documents.
- Supportive Documents: Cascadia reviewed documents besides the core planning documents to identify additional context for the gaps and opportunities assessment and recommendations for policy development at the next phase of the planning process. These plans have different planning time horizons and/or focus areas than the core documents; the goal of the policy audit is to understand their goals and context, rather than specifically noting and addressing gaps within these documents.
    - The document review did not include a review of codes and regulations. This level of review could be helpful for the County to complete during or after Climate Element policy development.
- Reference Documents: The City of Spokane and the City of Spokane Valley- as the two largest cities in the county- are both developing their own Climate Elements, and are valuable as a reference. We also reviewed the Countywide Planning Policies and will ensure alignment with them in developing Spokane County's CE.

Table 1. List of Core Documents Reviewed

Spokane County Comprehensive Plan	2023
Spokane County Hazard Mitigation Plan Volume 1: Planning-Area-Wide Elements	2020
Spokane County Hazard Mitigation Plan Volume 2: PLANNING PARTNER ANNEXES	2020
Spokane County Shoreline Master Program	2013

Table 2. List of Supporting Documents Reviewed

Spokane County Emergency Management Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan	2016
Spokane County Coordinated Water System Plan Update*	1999
2025-2030 6 Year Transportation, Stormwater and Wastewater Programs*	2024
Comprehensive Solid Waste and Moderate Risk Waste Management Plan for Spokane County	2022
Spokane Regional Transportation Council Transportation Improvement Plan*	2024
Spokane Aquifer Joint Board (SAJB) 2007 Wellhead Protection Update	2007
Cheney Comprehensive Plan 2017 through 2037	2017
City of Deer Park 2019 Comprehensive Plan	2019
U.S. Air Force Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan 2018-2022	2018
Town of Rockford Comprehensive Plan	2019
Town of Fairfield Comprehensive Plan	2017
City of Millwood Comprehensive Plan	2019
City of Spangle Comprehensive Plan	2019
WRIA 54 Watershed Plan	2009
WRIA 55-57 Streamflow Restoration Plan	2006

WRIA 56 Watershed Plan	2005

Table 3. List of Reference Documents Reviewed

Spokane Valley Comprehensive Plan	2016
City of Spokane Comprehensive Plan	2017
Regional Council of Governments , Countywide Planning Policies on Climate Change and Resiliency	2025

Policy Coding

Identified County climate policies, plans, and reports were coded for the following attributes to help assess climate policy trends and gaps: focus area, priority sector, climate impacts, and GHG emissions reduction strategies.

The *Policy Trends, Gaps & Opportunities* section below provides definitions of each coding category, reason for inclusion in database, and findings. Only policies from the County 's core documents were analyzed for the summary tables. Core documents included the Comprehensive Plan, the Shoreline Master Program, and the Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan. Each policy could be coded as multiple focus areas, priority sectors, or climate impacts. The cross-cutting code focuses on policies and processes that intersect across multiple sectors, governance, and planning processes—such as collaboration with counties or clean air agencies, which can directly and indirectly impact many sectors..

Identifying Policy Gaps

The consultant team identified policy gaps and opportunities by utilizing climate element planning guidance to ensure that each focus area and priority sector was comprehensive and included key strategies for enhancing climate sustainability, resilience, and equity. The guidance documents used to identify these gaps and inform policy development for the draft CE included the Commerce's Menu of Measures[3] and the Climate Element Planning Guidance.[4]

[3] Washington Department of Commerce. (2023). Climate Menu of Measures. Retrieved from https://deptofcommerce.app.box.com/s/n34kivgzn9rfe74jfz2vvzxqlrv7j9m9.
[4] Washington Department of Commerce. (2023). Climate Element Planning Guidance. Retrieved from https://deptofcommerce.app.box.com/s/bhqov8pvbiygssgjxbmtezzgzrtr7nal.

Policy Trends, Gaps & Opportunities

Summary

This section summarizes findings from Cascadia's review of the County 's climate planning documents. First, there is a summary of the key plans reviewed. Then, tables organize identified policies by focus area, priority sector, climate impact addressed, and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction strategy.

Core documents

Spokane County's core documents primarily emphasize resilience policies but often lack a strong climate focus. Most policies center on zoning, development, and ecosystem management, with limited attention to climate hazards or specific climate impacts. As a result, the overall policy quality in addressing climate change is low to moderate throughout these core documents.

Policies by Focus Area

For the policy audit, policies were categorized into three focus areas aligned with Commerce guidelines: Resilience, GHG Reduction, and Climate Equity. Of **the 102 policies reviewed, Resilience was the most prioritized, followed by GHG reduction. Climate Equity was the least addressed** with only one policy that had a direct equity focus[5]. This is a significant finding not only because climate equity is a minimum requirement for both sub-elements, but it is a key consideration in future steps such as engagement and policy development.

Table 4. Identified County Policies, by Focus Area

Focus Area	# Policies/Actions
Resilience	**82**
GHG Emission Reduction	**23**
Climate Equity	**1**

[5] Policies that explicitly advanced environmental justice and equity outcomes, such ensuring the fair distribution of benefits and resources, were tagged as "Climate Equity"

Policies by Priority Sector

Policies were analyzed for their alignment with key priority sectors (Table 5), which are drawn from Commerce guidance identifying the sectors most vulnerable to climate impacts in the state. The analysis of planning documents highlights a strong prevalence of County policies in sectors such as zoning & development, ecosystems, water resources, and transportation. These areas reflect the County 's primary focus on environmental and infrastructure-related measures.

However, other sectors show varying levels of representation. Health and well-being, economic development, and emergency management, have moderate policy coverage, indicating emerging areas of focus for the County. Sectors such as buildings & energy, cultural resources & practices, agriculture & food systems, and waste management have fewer than 10 policies or actions, suggesting they are significantly underrepresented and may require additional attention to support a more comprehensive approach to climate resilience and/or GHG emission reduction.

Table 5. Identified County Policies, by Priority Sector

Priority Sectors	# Policies/Actions
Zoning & Development	**57**
Ecosystems	**40**
Water Resources	**28**
Transportation	**20**
Health and Well-being	**17**
Economic Development	**10**
Emergency Management	**10**
Buildings & Energy	**8**
Cultural Resources & Practices	**6**
Agriculture & Food Systems	**5**
Crosscutting	**3**
Waste Management	**2**

Policies by Climate Impact

County policies were categorized by the climate impacts they addressed (Table 4). The most focus was given to variable precipitation (flooding, landslides) and community well-being, impacts crosscutting[6], and drought also received attention. Impacts like

[6] Policies coded as "impacts crosscutting" provide a general climate resilience benefit to the community, ecosystem, and/or built environment but are not tied to a specific climate impact.

wildfire/wildfire smoke, and extreme heat, with reduced attention and reduced snowpack showing no focus.

Table 6. Identified County Policies by Climate Impact

Climate Hazard	# Policies/Actions
Variable precipitation (flooding, landslides)	**33**
Community well-being	**20**
Impacts Crosscutting	**19**
Variable precipitation (drought)	**18**
Wildfire & wildfire smoke	**6**
Extreme heat	**5**
Reduced snowpack	**0**
Sea level rise & storm surges	**0**

Policies by GHG Emissions Reduction Strategy

County policies supporting GHG emission reduction strategies were reviewed and categorized (Table 7). The greatest emphasis was placed on vehicle miles traveled (VMT) reduction and multimodal transportation/transit-oriented development (TOD).

Areas like waste reduction, building decarbonization, GHG crosscutting[7], carbon sequestration received limited attention, while electric vehicles had no focus in the core document review.

Table 7. Identified County Policies, by GHG Reduction Strategy

GHG Reduction Strategies	# Policies/Actions
VMT reduction	16
Multimodal transportation/TOD	12
Waste reduction/diversion	3
Building decarbonization	2
GHG Emission Reduction Crosscutting	2
Carbon Sequestration	1
Electric Vehicles	0

[7] Policies coded as "GHG emissions reduction crosscutting" were broad GHG emission reduction policies not tied to a specific reduction strategy.

Resilience Policy Assessment

Overview

The following sections are organized by climate impacts identified to be most relevant to Spokane County and are expected to worsen due to climate change. The Climate Impacts Summary, completed in Spring 2025, details the projected climate impacts for the County.

In summary, Spokane County is expected to experience the following impacts:

- **Extreme Heat:** Higher annual average temperatures, with especially high temperature increases during the summer months.
- **Wildfire and Smoke:** Increased wildfire activity due to extreme heat and drought, resulting in increased smoke and poor air quality.
- **Drought:** Declining summer precipitation, leading to more frequent, longer, and severe regional droughts.
- **Extreme Precipitation and Flooding:** Increased flooding due to more frequent and intense extreme precipitation events.
- **Reduced Snowpack**: Warmer winter temperatures leading to decreased snow accumulation, earlier snowmelt, and reduced water availability in spring and summer.

Aligning with State guidance, the policies included in the resilience sub-element must, at a minimum, identify the action the County will take to fulfill the following:

Table 8. Commerce Resilience Requirements

Focus	Requirement
Resilience	Requirement 1: Address natural hazards created or aggravated by climate change, including sea level rise, landslides, flooding, drought, heat, smoke, wildfire, and other effects of changes to temperature and precipitation patterns;
	Requirement 2: Identify, protect, and enhance natural areas to foster climate resilience, as well as areas of vital habitat for safe species migration; and
	Requirement 3: Identify, protect, and enhance community resilience to climate impacts, including social, economic, and built-environment factors, which support adaptation to climate impacts consistent with environmental justice.

Community Wellbeing

The policy assessment identified several policies addressing climate change resilience and GHG reduction across multiple climate sectors and impacts. While these policies may not directly target specific climate impacts, they contribute to community well-being in Spokane County. The following criteria were considered when coding a policy as addressing community well-being:

- Policies that promote connected, inclusive communities by encouraging walkable neighborhoods, access to public spaces, multimodal transportation, and development that integrate environmental and cultural features (UL.2.2, UL.2.8, UL.2.11, UL.2.15, UL.11.11 a, b, f, g, h, i; T.3b.1; CF.14.17).
- Policies that support environmental health and quality by addressing air and water protection, sustainable land use, and public education on environmental impacts (T.8d.1, NE.18.4, NE.19.1, NE.35.4, Shoreline Policy 3, INITIATIVE #11).
- Policies that recognize and address the needs of low-income and underserved residents by encouraging public investment in human services, housing, and equitable community development. (ED.2.2, ED.6.4)
- Policies that encourage community participation and engagement in recreation, hazard awareness, and environmental stewardship activities (ED.8.2, CW-8, SC-4, Shoreline Restoration Policy 3a–c).
- Policies that center environmental justice by identifying and addressing specific needs and disproportionate impacts on vulnerable populations, including those historically excluded from decision-making.
- Policies that strengthen inclusive engagement processes, ensuring broad community participation, especially among overburdened and underserved groups in shaping County planning and development efforts.

While Spokane County's community well-being policies align with some related categories, they lack explicit integration of environmental justice principles and considerations for overburdened communities. Strong community well-being policies should inherently reflect these core values. Fostering a healthy, adaptable community is essential to supporting sustainable growth and protecting vulnerable populations from climate impacts.

Climate Equity

Climate impacts, such as extreme heat or shifting precipitation patterns, will affect existing housing, transportation, and energy infrastructure, especially in areas already vulnerable to flooding or landslides. Climate change also worsens existing risks, such as chronic health conditions, social and economic inequalities, and pollution exposure, disproportionately affecting overburdened communities, including communities of color, Indigenous people, elderly community members, and/or people with lower incomes who are impacted first and worst by climate change and environmental hazards. These

compounding risks highlight the need for policies that address cumulative environmental and health burdens across the County.

Understanding which assets and populations are most at risk from climate impacts, particularly in overburdened communities, can help inform climate policy focus areas and community priorities. The forthcoming Climate Vulnerability Assessment will guide policy by identifying areas, populations, and infrastructure most at risk from identified climate impacts. The assessment will also examine how socioeconomic stressors, such as poverty and inadequate housing, affect overburdened communities. These factors can exacerbate vulnerability when coupled with climate stressors, deepening societal inequities. Climate equity will be a focus of the Climate Element policies.

Resilience Policy Trends, Gaps, & Opportunities

The tables below overview trends, opportunities, and gaps in the Spokane County current climate resilience policy. The table headings indicate the "Sector Nexus," representing the priority sectors where the theme or impact intersects. These priority sectors were identified in Commerce's guidance. The complete list is available in Table 5

Note that the forthcoming Climate Vulnerability Assessment will provide detailed projections on climate risks, adaptive capacity, and vulnerability within the Spokane County informing additional policy opportunities and priorities for CE development .

Community Wellbeing

Table 9. Community Wellbeing Policy Assessment

Sector Nexus: Zoning and Development, Transportation, Ecosystem, Health and Well-being		
Existing Policy Trends Current policies: • Focus on walkable community spaces with closely connected centers to enhance accessibility and connectivity *(Comp Plan. UL.11.11, T.3b.1.).* • Recognize the needs of vulnerable populations through resources, planning, and budgeting for essential services, community development, housing, and economic opportunities *(Comp Plan ED.6.4, HMP. SC-4).* • Educate the public on general environmental topics to promote awareness, engagement, and the protection of water quality and air quality (*Comp Plan NE.19.1, NE.35.4, HMP. CW-8).* • Focus on local neighborhood needs while considering historical preservation, community character, green spaces, and trees *(Comp Plan. UL.2.8, CF.14.17, ED.8.2, SMP. 2.8 Policy 3).*	Existing Policy Gaps Current policies: • Do not address safe and universally accessible public spaces for all community members. • Have no mention of direct impact on respiratory health, children's health, and long-term community well-being is not emphasized when talking about water quality and air quality. • Don't explicitly include vulnerable populations in decision-making through participatory planning. • Lack mention of gathering spaces, resilience hubs, or programs that foster social resources and prepare for climate hazards.	Policy Opportunities Improve or add policies to: • Ensure neighborhoods have equitable access to welcoming green spaces, community gathering areas, and local resources that support connection, well-being, and recreation. • Link climate adaptation strategies with social equity and public health strategies • Address the social and mental health needs of displaced populations following disasters. • Deploy mobile resilience resources (e.g shaded pop-up tents, water stations, air-filtered vans) during extreme events to support high-risk areas not near existing shelters or hubs. • Expand community gardens, edible landscapes, and incentives for urban farming.
Key Considerations and Policy Quality • Policy quality for community well-being is **medium-low.** Policies cover various sectors but lack a strong foundation in community health, well-being, and protections against climate hazards.		

- Partnering with the **Department of Emergency Management for Spokane County** will be critical in developing climate preparedness and safety policies for vulnerable populations.

Extreme Heat

Table 10. Extreme Heat Policy Assessment

Sector Nexus: Zoning & Development, Ecosystems, Agriculture & Food Systems, Water Resources		
Existing Policy Trends Current policies… • Mitigate extreme heat by protecting and using native plants that provide shade and support evapotranspiration *(Comp Plan. NE.15.5, NE.22.15).* • Focus on appropriate tree selection in residential areas to enhance infrastructure compatibility and temperature regulation *(Comp Plan. UL.2.15).* • Have a general focus on environmental standards protecting agriculture in relation to water and fishers that can be affected by extreme heat *(Comp Plan. RL.4.4, NE.15.11).*	Existing Policy Gaps Current policies… • Lack direct measures addressing extreme heat across the 11 Commerce sectors. • Don't specifically mention extreme heat or the urban heat island effect. • Do not explicitly address overall community health impacts from extreme heat, though they mention vulnerable populations such as the elderly, children, outdoor workers, and low-income communities without AC access. • Do not consider the effects of extreme heat on local groundwater, aquifers, or other critical water sources. • Lack protections for culturally significant wildlife species impacted by extreme heat, such as Redband trout, salmon, fawns, and moose.	Policy Opportunities Improve or add policies to… • Establish shaded bus stops, reflective or permeable pavements, and heat-resistant infrastructure for public transit and pedestrian pathways. • Include wildlife-friendly cooling strategies, such as preserving wetlands, adding shaded water sources, or creating habitat corridors in urban planning. • Create programs that prioritize cooling resources, such as cooling centers or subsidies for in-home air conditioning, with special consideration for disadvantaged and vulnerable populations. • Launch educational campaigns to inform residents about heat risks, preventive measures, and available resources during heat waves. • Establish standards for urban design that reduce heat islands, such as limiting dark asphalt use and incentivizing reflective or porous materials. • Better protect the health and well-being of outdoor workers exposed to climate-

		exacerbated hazards by connecting workers and businesses with education and resources beyond existing state requirements.

Key Considerations and Policy Quality

- Extreme heat policies are **low** in quality, as existing plans do not directly address extreme heat or include specific resilience measures.

Foster strong partnerships with non-profits and NGO like Lands Council and The Spokane Conservation District that oversee **CoolCanopy** that help increase tree coverage outside of City of Spokane.

- When expanding cooling centers throughout the county, consider adding public cooling options beyond libraries and highlight other locations where people naturally gather.
- Utilize research from **Gonzaga Institute for Climate, Water, and the Environment** on extreme heat when developing educational outreach, programs, or other initiatives.

Wildfire, Smoke, and Air Quality

Table 11. Wildfire, Smoke and Air Quality Policy Assessment

Sector Nexus: Ecosystems, Zoning and Development Water Resources		
Existing Policy Trends Current policies… Use broad language to support regional efforts to improve air quality (*Comp Plan NE.35.4, NE.16.1).* • Educate the public about various hazards communities may face, including wildfires *(HMP CW-8, Comp Plan RL.6.1).* • Emphasize securing grant funding for acquiring properties in high-hazard areas, especially locations	Existing Policy Gaps Current policies… • Do not address health impacts from smoke impacts. • Lack educational materials on protection measures for land management, including resources for farmers, foresters, other land managers, and vulnerable populations. • Lack incorporating emergency evacuation and displacement planning into land use policies. • Do not specify requirements for defensible space, fire-resistant building materials, or	Policy Opportunities Improve or add policies to… • Develop policies targeting wildfire smoke impacts, such as air quality monitoring systems and public alert mechanisms. • Provide information on creating clean air shelters in homes, including affordable DIY air filtration systems (HEPA filters with box fans). • Require or support employers to implement policies or programs protecting outdoor workers' health and economic well-being beyond existing state requirements. • Encourage open space preservation as firebreaks to reduce wildfire spread, protect communities, and maintain ecological

with severe property loss *(HMP SC-4, CW-8).* • Align fire protection regulations with existing policies and best practices, integrating wildfire mitigation measures into zoning and land use regulations *(Comp Plan RL.6.1, HMP INITIATIVE #10)*	development restrictions in high-risk areas. • Do not outline incentives (tax benefits, streamlined permitting) for developments that incorporate fire-resistant design and landscaping. • Lack protection of local ecosystems, wildlife and critical areas.	benefits, such as habitat connectivity and watershed protection. • Promote fire-adapted communities through public outreach, education, and incentives for home hardening, including the use of fire-resistant building materials, defensible space creation, and vegetation management to reduce wildfire risk. • Incentivize developers to incorporate smoke-resilient features (HVAC systems with filtration, airtight windows) in new construction. • Implement and encourage measures to reduce sedimentation in streams resulting from wildfire damage and the associated impacts of landslides and flooding. • Partner with the Spokane County Conservation District's Firewise Program to provide educational outreach on home hardening and wildfire risk reduction specifically tailored for new homeowners in the county.

Key Considerations and Policy Quality

Wildfire and wildfire smoke policies are **medium-low quality**, with very limited provisions addressing smoke. They lack connections to climate hazards, environmental protections, and public health measures needed to safeguard communities and the environment.

- The county has fewer policies on wildfire and wildfire smoke but has extensive wildfire and vegetation maps that will help inform the **Vulnerability Assessment (VA).**
- Partner with the **Spokane Regional Clean Air Agency** to gather input on upcoming engagement opportunities and collect feedback on potential wildfire smoke and wildfire-related Climate Element policies.

Drought

Table 12. Drought Policy Assessment

Sector Nexus: Water Resources, Ecosystem, Agriculture		
Existing Policy Trends Current policies…	Existing Policy Gaps Current policies…	Policy Opportunities Improve or add policies to…
• Protect key water resources, including the Spokane River, as well as other important community lakes, rivers, and streams, through water resource policies (*Comp Plan NE.22.7, NE.30.5*). • Promote water conservation by providing educational materials and resources for residents on landscaping and other water-saving methods. *(Comp Plan NE.18.4, NE.18.10).* • Support the development of wellhead protection measures in collaboration with water purveyors countywide *(Comp Plan NE.17.9, NE.21.2).* • Encourage businesses to adopt innovative water conservation strategies, including wastewater reuse *(Comp Plan NE.18.11, NE.19.2).* • Address the overuse of surface and groundwater beyond sustainable recharge capacities *(Comp Plan NE.15.6, NE.22.1).* • Mention the benefits of native vegetation but do not specifically address its role in drought	• Do not outline specific actions for drought preparedness, response, or long-term resilience. • Do not explicitly recognize the relationship between prolonged drought and increased wildfire risk. • Mention water conservation; however, they do not mandate or incentivize the reuse of captured stormwater for non-drinking purposes like irrigation, landscaping, and wildfire suppression. • Do not offer strong incentives for farmers to implement water-saving infrastructure. • Lack policies requiring or incentivizing drought-resistant landscaping in new developments.	• Encourage the use of native species and drought-resistant trees in urban and rural landscapes to enhance resilience and reduce water demand while ensuring communities have access to low-maintenance green spaces and parks that provide recreational opportunities and support water conservation efforts. • Provide financial incentives (e.g., rebates or tax credits) for farmers, residents, and businesses to install water-saving technologies or systems, such as rainwater cisterns, drip irrigation, soil moisture sensors, or smart irrigation controllers. • Incorporate water-saving designs and drought resilience into urban planning, including compact development patterns and reduced impervious surfaces. • Expand in language outreach programs promoting indoor and outdoor water conservation, and money saving tips. • Increase aquatic habitat resilience to low summer flows in Spokane County by enhancing water storage on the

Policy key considerations and policy quality continued on the next page

resistance. *(Comp Plan NE.15.5, NE.22.7, NE.30.5).*		landscape, conserving water, protecting groundwater recharge areas, maintaining cool water temperatures, and improving water quality.

Key Considerations and Policy Quality

- Overall, Spokane County has **medium-high quality** drought policies due to a combination of moderate water conservation measures, limited enforcement mechanisms, and a lack of comprehensive long-term planning for climate resilience.
- Depending on the findings from the VA, the County may consider developing a **Drought Management Plan**, with a particular focus on small cities that may be more vulnerable to drought impacts.

Extreme Precipitation and Flooding

Table 13. Extreme Precipitation and Flooding Policy Assessment

Sector Nexus: Water Resources, Ecosystems, Zoning & Development, Emergency Management		
Existing Policy Trends Current policies… • Emphasize general conservation of wetlands, riparian buffers, and floodplains to maintain their natural flood-mitigation functions *(Comp Plan NE.15.2, NE.15.5, SMP NE.30.3).* • Include protections for wetlands from development, incorporating flood control designs and strategies to prevent erosion and mitigate flooding impacts *(Comp Plan NE.15.10, NE.15.1, NE.15.13).* • Support the use of permeable and semi-permeable surfaces to parking areas and other innovative storm water control alternatives (*Comp Plan NE.17.19, NE.17.8, NE.22.1).* • Prioritize sustainable flood management by promoting bioengineering techniques over hard structures for floodway stabilization and ensuring compliance with the National Flood Insurance Program *(SMP NE.30.2, NE.31.2).* • Emphasize community involvement and collaboration by encouraging citizen participation in shoreline rehabilitation efforts and fostering partnerships between private and	Existing Policy Gaps Current policies… • Lack resources or targeted financial support for flood-prone, low-income, or overburdened communities, such as buyout programs or infrastructure investments. • Have little focus on emergency response coordination, or evacuation planning for flood-prone communities and areas. • Include aspects like permeable surfaces for stormwater management but lack a broader emphasis on other green infrastructure solutions such as rain gardens or bioswales. • Are missing language on long-term climate resilience strategies, such as integrating climate change into development codes, updating flood maps for projected climate impacts	Policy Opportunities Improve or add policies to… • Launch in language educational campaigns to increase awareness of flood risks, preparedness measures, and the importance of sustainable stormwater practices, with a specific focus on vulnerable populations. • Incorporate flood resilience into the design and maintenance of sidewalks, and transit systems. • Consider climate change, including extreme precipitation, increased winter streamflow, and other impacts, in floodplain management planning. • Utilize 500-year flood mapping data to inform future planning and development in flood-prone areas. • Require the use of green infrastructure and low-impact development to address increased storm intensities and stormwater runoff. • Enhance emergency preparedness, response, and recovery efforts to mitigate risks and impacts associated with flooding and extreme precipitation events worsened by climate change.

Policy trends and key considerations and policy quality continued on the next page

public entities *(SMP Policy 3, HMP CW 8).* • Encourage the use of trees and native plants to enhance natural floodplains and mitigate the impacts of flooding by stabilizing soil, reducing erosion, and improving water absorption in flood-prone areas *(Comp Plan NE.30.5, NE.22.15).* • Collaborate with partners to address recurring flooding in 100-year flood zones by implementing mitigation measures like acquiring frequently flooded homes and raising roads in flood-prone areas *(HMP SC-4, SC-7, SC-6, INITIATIVE #7).*		
Key Considerations and Policy Quality • Flooding and extreme precipitation policies are of **medium quality**, with detailed actions to improve stormwater and surface water management. However, they lack connections to climate change, and only a few policies meet Commerce's minimum requirements. • Spokane County can enhance flood resilience by partnering with organizations focused on flood mitigation, watershed protection, and land conservation, such as **the Spokane County Flood Control Zone District**, **Inland Northwest Land Conservancy**, **Spokane Riverkeeper**, and **Spokane Conservation District**.		

GHG Emissions Reduction Policy Assessment

Climate Mitigation in Spokane County

The following sections are organized around key greenhouse gas (GHG) emission sources most relevant to Spokane County's emissions profile and Commerce requirements, including transportation systems, buildings and energy use, and waste management. These sectors were identified through both the Commerce guidance and the policy audit.

The policies included in the GHG emissions reduction sub-element must, at a minimum, identify the actions the County will take to fulfill the following:

Table 14. Commerce GHG Requirements

Focus	Requirement
GHG Emissions Reduction	**Requirement 1:** Result in reductions in overall GHG emissions generated by transportation and land use within the jurisdiction but without increasing emissions elsewhere in Washington;
	Requirement 2: Result in reductions in per capita vehicle miles traveled (VMT) within the jurisdiction but without increasing greenhouse gas emissions elsewhere in Washington; and,
	Requirement 3: Prioritize reductions that benefit overburdened communities in order to maximize the co-benefits of reduced air pollution and environmental justice.

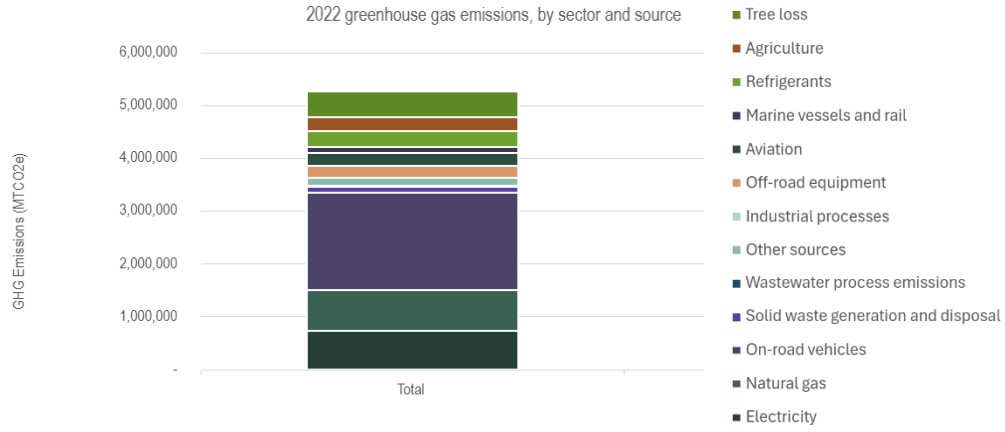
The Climate Element will address all required components, using findings from the recent GHG inventory, the policy audit memo, and staff interviews to inform its policies and goals.

Key Emissions Takeaways

Spokane County was one of 11 counties that participated in a 11-county inventory, led by Commerce and conducted by Cascadia. The GHG emissions inventories were completed in a way that is comparable among the 11 counties, following Commerce guidance.

Using 2022 as the baseline year, Spokane County's Total Community Sector-Based GHG Emissions inventory includes a broad range of sources. The largest contributor is the transportation sector, accounting for 55% of these emissions. These total 5,276,414 $MTCO_2e$. While transportation remains a major contributor, other significant sources include land use (14%), with 5.3% from agriculture and 9.4% from tree loss. Refrigerants also account for a notable portion, making up 6% of the total inventory.

Figure 1: Total Community Sector-Based GHG Emissions for Spokane County



Transportation accounts for the largest share of emissions, which is common for jurisdictions of this size. The graphs below (Figure 2 & Figure 3) highlight the breakdown of both on-road and off-road emissions.

Figure 2: Transportation Emissions, by Activity

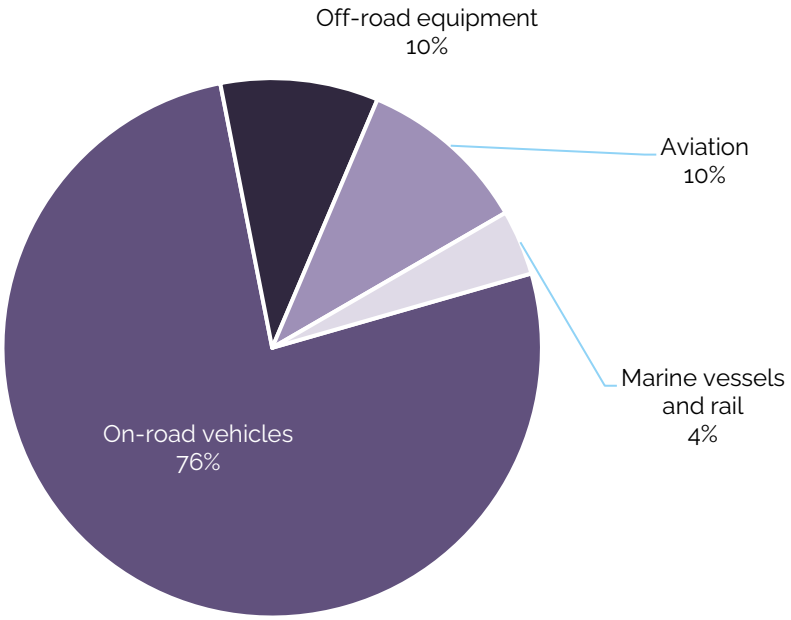
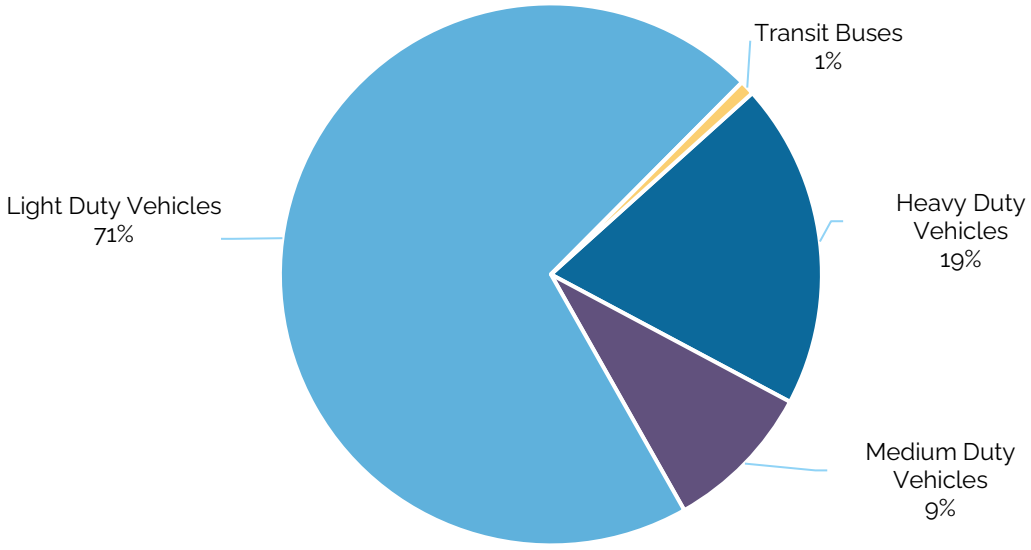


Figure 3: On-Road Emissions, by Vehicle Type



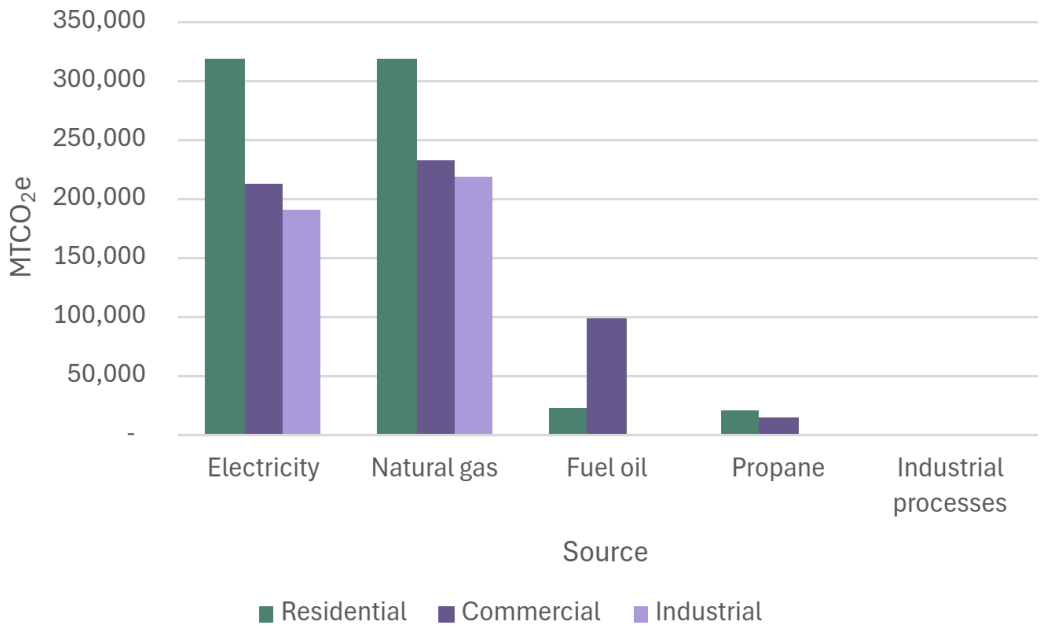
Spokane County's transportation-related emissions total approximately 2.44 million $MTCO_2e$, representing the largest share of the county's overall greenhouse gas

emissions. These emissions come primarily from on-road vehicles, which account for 76% of transportation emissions, followed by aviation at 10%, off-road equipment at 9%, and marine vessels and rail at 4%.

Within the on-road category, light-duty vehicles are the largest contributor, responsible for 71% of on-road emissions, followed by heavy-duty vehicles at 19%, medium-duty vehicles at 9%, and transit buses at 1%. Fuel use is dominated by gasoline, which contributes 70% of on-road emissions, with diesel making up 28%, and ethanol accounting for just 2%. Alternative fuels such as electricity, propane, and compressed natural gas contribute less than one percent. Off-road equipment emissions total 231,269 $MTCO_2e$, with the highest emissions from the agriculture sector (27%), followed by industrial equipment (22%) and construction equipment (19%). Other sources such as lawn and garden, commercial, and recreational equipment contribute smaller shares. Despite being relatively smaller in scale, off-road sources remain a notable contributor to transportation-related emissions.

The second largest source of emissions is related to the built environment, meaning electricity and the heating/cooling of residential, commercial, and industrial budlings. Figure 4 shows that the largest source of emissions in this category is from electricity and natural gas to residential buildings, followed by commercial and industrial.

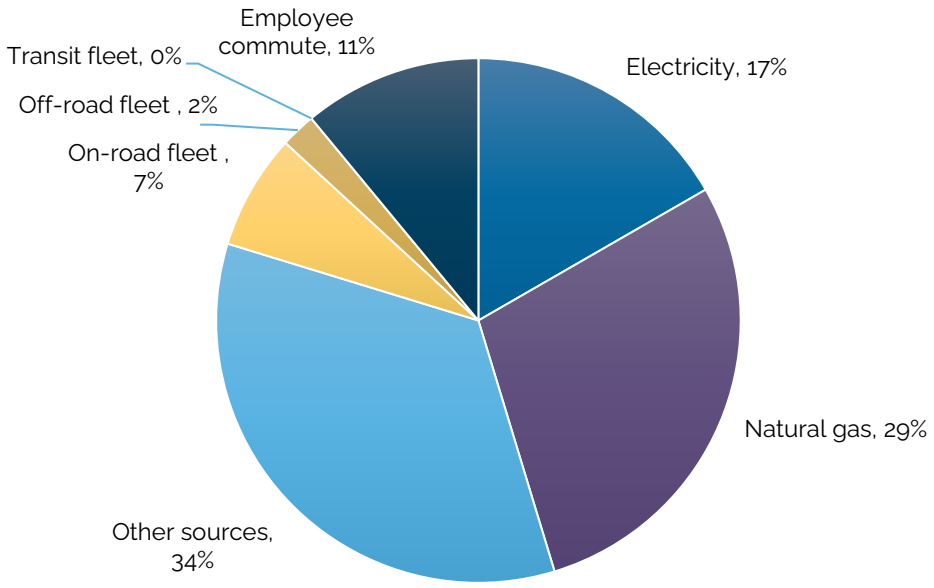
Figure 4: Built Environment GHG Emissions, by Source and Sector



The GHG Emissions Inventory also identifies 27,078 $MTCO_2e$ from Spokane County government-related activities and operations. While a small number relative to community emissions, Spokane County has a lot of direct influence over its own

activities and operations, and should be considered in the development of the CE. About 80% of government-related emissions are built environment-related, e.g. from natural gas, electricity, and other sources that provide electricity and heating and cooling to government buildings. About 20% comes from transportation, including the on-road and off-road fleet and employee commuting.

Figure 5: Government emissions



Spokane County currently does not have a specific greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction target. However, the County has the opportunity to use data from the recent GHG inventory to develop projections and set a locally appropriate reduction goal. This would help guide future planning efforts and align with state-level climate commitments.

At the state level, Washington has adopted legally binding GHG emission limits, established by the Legislature in 2020:

- 2020 – Reduce to 1990 levels
- 2030 – 45% below 1990 levels
- 2040 – 70% below 1990 levels
- 2050 – 95% below 1990 levels and achieve net-zero emissions

Setting a local emissions reduction target will help Spokane County align with these statewide goals, prioritize emissions-reducing strategies, and track progress over time.

GHG Emissions Reduction Policy Trends, Gaps, & Opportunities

The following section reviews policy trends, opportunities, and gaps related to GHG emissions reduction from key focus areas identified in the GHG inventory**.** For each focus area, the Sector Nexus represents the priority sectors (those listed in the Department of Commerce's guidance) that intersect it.

Buildings & Energy

Table 15. Buildings and Energy Policy Assessment

Sector Nexus: Buildings & Energy, Zoning & Development, Waste Management, Economy		
Existing Policy Trends Current policies… • Encourage industries to come to Spokane County that focus on low energy consumption and resource recycling (Comp Plan UL 14.5). • Support collaboration with utility providers for the provision of electrical services (Comp Plan CF 14).	Existing Policy Gaps Current policies… • Lack clear strategies to achieve long-term renewable energy goals. • Do not acknowledge or address the up-front costs of transitioning homes and businesses to electricity, which can burden lower-income residents. • Do not include policies to assist businesses in achieving energy efficiency upgrades. • Mention bonus densities, zero lot line housing, auxiliary structures, and accessory dwellings but do not provide incentives for making them energy-efficient. • Lack policies that address the reliability of energy grids during severe weather events. • Do not address the integration of solar energy or other energy-efficient technologies in building	Policy Opportunities Improve or add policies to… • Seek funding for programs that improve energy efficiency, especially in overburdened communities—such as renters and lower-income households facing high energy burden (the share of income spent on energy bills) or those more vulnerable to climate impacts like heat and smoke. Weatherization and other efficiency upgrades can help reduce costs and improve health outcomes. • Support industries in obtaining green certifications by providing resources and assistance to meet these standards. • Promote the adoption of clean electricity sources by utility providers and advance building decarbonization efforts. • Strengthen utility resilience in areas vulnerable to various climate hazards. • Promote solar energy development through strategic siting, solar-ready construction, and infrastructure integration.
Key Considerations and Policy Quality		

- There are limited policies related to building decarbonization and energy efficiency. It would be valuable to explore how the County is currently attracting industries with low energy consumption—are there existing incentives? Overall, GHG emission reduction policies related to the buildings and energy sector are **medium-low.**
- Developing a green business network could help low-energy industries share best practices and improve sustainability efforts.
- Consider Collaborating with Rewiring America to educate renters and homeowners about local rebates for home electrification.

Transportation

Table 16. Transportation Policy Assessment

Sector Nexus: Zoning & Development, Health & Well-being, Economic Development		
Existing Policy Trends Current policies… • Prioritize high-capacity transit services and facilities *(Comp Plan UL.2.17, UL.11.3, T.3b.2).* • Concentrate urban development in areas with convenient access to key amenities *(Comp Plan UL.2.17, UL.11.3, UL.11.11).* • Emphasize multipurpose non-motorized trails that accommodate all ages and physical abilities *(Comp Plan PO.7.1, UL.11.11f, SMP Policy 6).* • Target reductions in single-occupancy vehicle trips while also	Existing Policy Gaps Current policies… • Do not set measurable targets for shifting trips to low-emission modes like walking, biking, or transit. • Lack of access to reliable, low-emissions transportation options limits quick and equitable access to key community resources such as healthcare, grocery stores, schools, and job centers—contributing to higher greenhouse gas emissions. • Have no policies addressing electric vehicles (EVs) or EV infrastructure, including efforts to expand charging access in rural areas. • Policies do not include education on available routes or easy ways to navigate the county using buses, biking, or other multimodal options, limiting public awareness and accessibility.	Policy Opportunities Improve or add policies to… • Facilitate the transition to EVs through expansion of reliable EV charging infrastructure and public education on options and available incentives/rebates. • Enhance public transit options by coordinating with local agencies and social services to meet the needs of underserved populations, particularly seniors, people with disabilities, and households with low-income. • Provide low-income residents subsidies to purchase or lease electric vehicles and bicycles. • Create a safe, well-connected, and attractive bicycle and pedestrian transportation network to encourage active transportation, informed by findings from the Spokane Regional Transportation

addressing overall traffic and congestion *(Comp Plan T.11.1, T.3b.4, UL.11.11a).*	• Lack equitable access to low-emissions transportation, such as transit affordability or infrastructure in overburdened or rural communities—missing an opportunity to reduce transportation-related GHGs while advancing equity.	Council's System Resiliency Assessment Plan. • Ensure transportation planning and funding considers multimodal options like walking, biking, and transit essential services, and prioritize them to reduce GHG emissions and meet concurrency requirements. • Implement a behavioral change campaign to increase public awareness and perception of active transportation options, such as walking, biking, and transit.
Key Considerations and Policy Quality • Transportation policies include strong elements of multimodal transit and development but lack specificity in addressing climate impacts within the transportation sector in a comprehensive, integrated manner. Overall, the policy quality is **medium-low.** • **Seek state and federal funding for EV infrastructure upgrades**, as there is a statewide push for rebates and tax credits for EV adoption. Expanding charging infrastructure in public spaces across the county will be essential to support this transition.		

Solid Waste

Table 17. Solid Waste Policy Assessment

Sector Nexus: Buildings & Energy, Economic Development, Zoning & Development		
Existing Policy Trends Current policies… • Encourage creative approaches to increase housing supply, such as self-built homes, repurposing materials, rehabilitating existing structures, and converting buildings to reduce construction waste *(Comp Plan CF 8.2, UL 14.5).* • Promote general recycling initiatives to minimize waste *(Comp Plan CF 8.2).* • Enhance public awareness of waste reduction and diversion by developing and promoting targeted messaging in collaboration with local and regional stakeholders *(SWMP Goal 1).*	Existing Policy Gaps Current policies… • Do not specifically support goals to reduce GHG emissions or build resilience. • Do not focus on accessible, multilingual outreach and education. • Have no dedicated effort to shift public behavior through sustained education campaigns that promote recycling, composting, and waste reduction practices. • Don't have specific measures in place to help businesses prepare for the organics law or to encourage best waste practices.. • Don't have demolition and deconstruction policies that would provide developers with guidance on material reuse, recycling requirements, and waste diversion strategies to reduce environmental impact.	Policy Opportunities Improve or add policies to… • Use current GHG emissions data to set and achieve specific goals around waste diversion and waste generation reduction. • Focus on reducing generation and disposal of high-emission materials, such as organic waste and paper. Consider food rescue policies. • Support equitable outreach and engagement around waste reduction, recycling, and composting. • Incorporate multilingual resources into the Master Composter/Recycler program and other public events and materials to ensure inclusive education on waste reduction, composting, and recycling for diverse community members. • Strengthen partnerships with food banks and local businesses to divert food waste and support food security. • Incentivize the recycling of construction and demolition debris by developing a

		program to ensure such materials are recycled and minimized. • Minimize carbon emission impacts of building demolition with best available recycling strategies.
Key Considerations and Policy Quality • Waste policies, including recycling, organics management, and demolition debris diversion, are **underdeveloped and lack clear incentives or mandates.** Policies in this section are **medium.** • Collaborate with **Waste Management** to develop **public awareness and behavioral change campaigns** for residents.		

Supportive documents

The supportive documents primarily cover plans from smaller cities within Spokane County. In this review, Cascadia examined the comprehensive plans of the Town of Rockford, Fairfield, the City of Millwood, Spangle, Deer Park, and Cheney as well as other County-wide planning documents.

These cities' comprehensive plans share similarities with the County's related to climate-related policies. While these policies do not all explicitly mention climate change, climate resilience, or GHG emissions, many have indirect connections to climate resilience. Some policies within these comprehensive plans do provide direct climate resilience benefits, even though they do not use climate-specific terminology.

Below is a summary of key themes related to the sectors identified by the Department of Commerce. This summary highlights policies from each jurisdiction but does not assess their quality or potential improvements. Overall, most policies have little to no direct connection to climate considerations.

Cheney

- Land Use – Protect and enhance Cheney's agricultural economy, open space areas, and natural resources through sustainable planning and conservation efforts. Collaborate with Spokane County and land trusts to preserve open space and manage growth responsibly, discouraging development in sensitive areas like wetlands and steep slopes.
- Zoning & Housing – Facilitate the provision of affordable housing that fits Cheney's neighborhoods while supporting the preservation and adaptive reuse of historic buildings.
- Transportation – Promote land use and growth patterns that ensure walkable neighborhoods with access to civic and service amenities. Develop a complete transportation system that supports efficient movement, multi-modal options, and safe biking and walking infrastructure.
- Water Resources – Protect Cheney's water quality by improving stormwater management, reducing impervious surfaces, and ensuring sustainable water use. Implement measures to prevent pollution and safeguard wetlands and surface waters.

Deer Park

- Parks & Open Space – Deer Park prioritizes recreational opportunities, open space conservation, and urban buffers to enhance community well-being and environmental quality while expanding park accessibility.
- Water Resources– Protects wetlands and surface waters by preventing pollution and promoting sustainable land use practices.
- Waste Management – Supports waste reduction, material reuse, and circular economy initiatives while addressing solid waste challenges for underserved communities through education and outreach.

Fairfield

- Land Use & Housing – Supports diverse housing supply and environmentally sensitive energy/weatherization assistance while ensuring protection of critical areas.
- Transportation – Promotes alternative transportation, public transit, and multimodal connectivity, with equity considerations for special-needs populations.
- Water Resources – Requires stormwater management, infrastructure planning, and specific protection of Rattler Run Creek in development.

Millwood

- Water Resources – Policies focus on managing stormwater runoff to protect drinking water, prevent habitat degradation, and reduce soil erosion, addressing risks from flooding and landslides.
- Transportation & Community Well-being – Efforts emphasize enhancing safety, accessibility, and efficiency for all transportation modes, including walking, biking, and transit, to improve mobility and public health.
- Ecosystems & Critical Areas – Prioritizes conservation of fish and wildlife habitats while integrating best available science into critical areas ordinances to guide zoning and development decisions.

Rockford

- Land Use & Housing – The Town of Rockford promotes multi-family housing to accommodate diverse residential needs and provides energy and weatherization assistance to residents through utilities and non-profits.
- Transportation – Supports energy conservation in development and expansion of Spokane Transit Authority's public transit system, including alternative and renewable energy-based transportation modes.

- Water Resources – Has policies that support stormwater management in new developments to protect wetlands, steep slopes, and surface waters from erosion and flooding impacts.
- Ecosystems – The Town of Rockford encourages tree planting in public spaces to enhance community well-being and environmental resilience.
- Economic Development – Supports reliable and affordable energy resources for businesses and residents to promote sustainability and economic stability.

Spangle

- Water Resources – Policies focus on identifying flood-prone areas, protecting water quality, and ensuring stormwater management in street construction to address variable precipitation risks like flooding and landslides.
- Zoning and Development & Transportation – Efforts emphasize compact development, and reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT).
- Buildings & Energy – Policies encourage voluntary energy efficiency efforts and renewable energy adoption for homes and businesses, with additional focus on weatherization programs.

Barriers to Implementation

To successfully implement climate policies and enhance climate resilience and reduce GHG emissions, Spokane County must address barriers that may impact both immediate and long-term efforts. Potential barriers for Spokane County, drawn from other jurisdictions' experience implementing climate policies, may include:

- Funding constraints for new climate projects
- Limited staff capacity
- Lack of buy-in from community members and/or County council members
- State and federal budget constraints and shifting legislative priorities

Next Steps

By identifying trends, gaps, and opportunities in existing plans, this policy assessment will help inform the County's draft Climate Element. The consultant team will collaborate with the County, the Climate Policy Technical Advisory Committee, and the community to develop policies that integrate the opportunities outlined in this memorandum, community input, and key findings from baseline assessments, such as the climate vulnerability assessment.

This climate policy assessment process also revealed the following observations for consideration in developing the Spokane County Climate Element:

- **The Climate Element can serve as a central resource to reaffirm the existing resilience and mitigation policies established in the Comprehensive Plan**, while also referencing the County's ongoing updates to several key climate-related documents and plans.
- **Findings from the Climate Impacts Summary and Climate Vulnerability Assessment will be essential to incorporate into Climate Element resilience and GHG policies,** ensuring greater specificity and relevance in addressing climate risks, vulnerabilities, and adaptive Capacity. Current County policies do not fully reflect the projected impacts of extreme heat, drought, variable precipitation, and wildfire in Spokane County.
- **Many opportunities exist to address the needs of vulnerable and frontline communities in addressing climate change.** For example, the Comprehensive Plan should tackle health, transportation, and utility concerns related to expected extreme heat, smoke, and flooding events, especially for those who are disproportionately affected by climate-related risks.

Spokane County