



CITY OF SUMAS

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Memo

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the Sumas City Council

From: Carson Cortez, City Planner, City of Sumas

Date: August 14, 2025

Re: Sumas 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update: Chapters 4-10

On August 11, 2025, the Sumas City Council began its initial review of the proposed 2025 update to the Sumas Comprehensive Plan. At the August 11th meeting, Council reviewed Chapters 1 through 3 which are the Introduction, Background, and Land Use Element chapters respectively. At the Council meeting on August 25, 2025, the Sumas City Council will review the seven remaining chapters, Chapter 4 through 10. Although this separation of the chapters seems quite unbalanced, the reasoning is that Chapters 3 and 4 are the largest in the Comprehensive Plan, so separating them during the review process is crucial. This memo will serve to provide an overview of each chapter and what the City Council can expect from each of them during their review.

Chapter 4 – Capital Facilities Element

This is the largest chapter in the Comprehensive Plan. The Capital Facilities element provides an overview of facilities that are owned and operated by the City or other public or semi-public entities serving the community of Sumas. The purpose of this element is to identify these facilities and use our population projections to identify what improvements need to be made to each of these kinds of facilities in order to accommodate all the projected population growth that Sumas may receive during the planning period. The first several sections are dedicated to the City's sanitary sewer, water, and storm sewer systems.

The City's sanitary sewer system is quite unique compared to all the other Cities within Whatcom County. The reason for this is because of our method of treatment. We are the only municipality in the County that collects the sewage and then sends it across the international border to a treatment facility located in Canada. To review, the City has an agreement with the Cities of Abbotsford and Mission in British Columbia wherein Sumas

collects its sewage and then sends it to the Joint Abbotsford Mission Environmental Systems (JAMES) wastewater treatment plant located on the Fraser River. Population projections show that Sumas will not have enough capacity with the current conditions of the system to effectively transport all the projected increases in sewage from Sumas to the JAMES plant. The parties involved have begun talks regarding cost-sharing arrangements to help pay for the upgrades required to provide sufficient capacity. Once the capacity issues are resolved, the City will begin the task of expanding the sewer system out to the UGA expansion areas. Sumas' policy is that developers bear the burden of extending utilities, therefore the City does not have to incur those costs. This way, extensions to the system will occur when required for new development.

The City's water system is renowned for the quality of its drinking water, despite the fact that the water does not go through any sort of treatment process. For the purposes of this Comprehensive Plan Update, the City has taken the opportunity to work with Cascade Engineering Group to update the Sumas Comprehensive Water System Plan, which was last updated in 2011. Through this process, the City and Cascade have determined that there are enough water rights still available to Sumas to accommodate the projected population growth. Future projects involving the water system are mostly maintenance-based, with some projects for extending the system in the two UGA expansion directions. Similar to the sanitary sewer system, the City also keeps the policy that the burden of extending the water system to accommodate new development is borne by the developer.

The City's storm sewer system is one that is currently undergoing upgrades following the 2021 flood event. The relatively flat nature of the area surrounding Sumas results in the pooling of stormwater in depressions, causing minor ponding during rain events. The City has made upgrades to the storm sewer system to help the efficiency of the outfall system. Recently, the City installed duck bills to the end of their stormwater outfalls which serve as backflow preventers, stopping stormwater from flowing back up the pipes and out of the storm drains onto the streets. Any expansion to the stormwater system will happen as needed and will be paid for and constructed by the developer.

The next section of the Capital Facilities chapter is dedicated to City-owned properties and structures and their current conditions. This is a new section that is not required by State law but was added by staff because there wasn't a section for these facilities prior. No future projects have been identified for these properties and structures as most of them have recently gone through maintenance and renovation. The City will address issues as they arise.

Within the Capital Facilities chapter, there are three sections dedicated to different service districts within which Sumas is located. The first is the School District. The Nooksack Valley School District recently updated their own Capital Facilities Plan. Their plan shows no major projects during the planning period as all School District facilities have been renovated recently. Sumas Elementary School was the latest to receive a major renovation, so other projects of that scope are not expected in the next 20 years.

The next service district is the Police Department. If Sumas' population grows at the rate projected in this Comprehensive Plan, the Sumas Police Department will need to add an additional Police Officer soon if it wishes to keep its capacity of at least 3 Police Officers per 1,000 residents. Besides the potential increase in Officers, the Police Department expects to continue operations as they have during the planning period.

The final service district is the Fire District. The City of Sumas contracts with Whatcom County Fire District No. 14 to provide our fire protection needs. The City is currently working with Fire District 14 to update their Capital Facilities Plan. The Fire District is currently looking into finding another location in Sumas to relocate their station, although these conversations are in the very early stages.

The next section of note in the Capital Facilities Element chapter is the Parks and Recreation section. This section provides an overview of the parks and recreation facilities currently located in Sumas. It also describes the results of a community survey that was conducted in 2000. This survey was done in preparation for the inclusion of a Parks and Recreation section in the Comprehensive Plan. The survey provided a list of potential new recreational amenities to add to Sumas, as well as a ranking of them based on priority. In reviewing the list, City Staff have removed potential options that are no longer feasible, such as: swimming pool, skatepark, soccer fields, and BMX park. Because the City has recently invested significant funds into upgrading our current recreational facilities, Staff currently have no set plans to expand any facilities. However, expansions to the trail system and ball fields will be prioritized should the opportunity arise.

The final section of note is the 6-Year Financial Analysis section. This section reviews the current state of all capital facilities funds that the City currently has and uses historical trends to attempt to determine how these funds will do with the projected increase in population. The overall result is that almost all funds will begin to decline as population increases. The Sewer fund, especially, has the potential to decline quite quickly. The electrical fund appears to be the only fund increasing, and the stormwater fund seems to be going steady, but all the rest of the funds appear to be in decline.

Chapter 5 – Housing Element

This chapter provides an overview of Sumas' current housing stock, as well as affordability and availability data. Then, using the population and growth projections proposed by the City, an estimate for the amount of homes needed to be built to accommodate the increase in population growth is determined. In order to do this, the City has to show, based on the Land Capacity Analysis shown in Chapter 3, Land Use Element, that the City has enough buildable land area to accommodate all the new housing units.

Washington State House Bill 1220, passed in 2021, added additional requirements which will have Cities ensure that their jurisdiction can provide adequate buildable land

area to support housing of all income brackets. To do this, the State created the Housing for All Planning Tool (HAPT), which is designed to help calculate how much housing of each income bracket each County and the cities therein need to accommodate in order to meet State requirements. In this chapter, Staff provide a breakdown of how many housing units would need to be built to accommodate the projected population growth, as well as breaking it down by income bracket. The resulting figure is quite a bit higher than what it would actually take to house 1,000 new residents, but the point is to show the State that we can accommodate that much housing.

Chapter 6 – Transportation Element

This chapter is currently not yet finalized as City Staff are still waiting on results from a model analysis being carried out by the Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG). This chapter provides an overview of the transportation system in Sumas and determines if the quality of our transportation system would be able to withstand the projected increase in population. This chapter looks at several different factors, including traffic volumes, pavement conditions, collisions, border crossings, freight, rail systems, air traffic, highways, commute times, public transport and bicycle and pedestrian facilities. Then, it determines what upgrades need to occur to the transportation system in order to accommodate the increase in population.

HB 1181 (2023) added a new requirement which was to pay extra attention to the adequacy of the City's non-motorized facilities, specifically pedestrian and bicycle facilities. The City does not provide any designated bicycle facilities, so City Staff chose to focus on upgrades to pedestrian facilities to meet the requirement. The Chapter ends with the Complete Streets section. Complete Streets is a set of policies that the City has adopted which guide what facilities are provided with all new road construction projects.

Chapter 7 – Utilities Element

This chapter provides an overview of the utilities available in Sumas that were not discussed in the Capital Facilities Element. This includes natural gas, electrical, and telecommunications systems. Natural gas is provided by Cascade Natural Gas in Sumas. Due to the relative vicinity of natural gas facilities around Sumas, the community is not expected to run into any natural gas shortages in the near future.

Electricity is provided by the City, who purchases their electricity from Bonneville Power Administration (BPA). After purchase, the electricity has to be transmitted over Puget Sound Energy (PSE) power lines, so the City and BPA have an agreement with PSE to allow this system to work. The section discusses the current status of the electrical system in Sumas, as well as any upcoming projects, including the circuit upgrade on Bob Mitchell Ave which the City is close to beginning.

The final utilities mentioned in this chapter are the telecommunications facilities. In the past, this section focused more on telephone lines and television coverage provided by the City. However, in the current age of cellular technology and fiber optics, the focus of this section has changed. Currently, internet service in Sumas can be provided by Comcast, PogoZone, and Ziplly Fiber. Plain Old Telephone Services (POTS) can still be provided by Frontier Communications. Digital Subscriber Lines (DSL) and Ethernet are available for internet access.

Chapter 8 – Economic Development Element

This chapter examines Sumas' businesses and the overall economic development of the community. It provides an overview of the current conditions of economic development in Sumas and determines what changes could be made to improve these conditions. For this chapter, Sumas' projected increase of 500 jobs is of special interest. The 500-job projection is not based on historical trends, but is a proactive goal established by the City to reflect increases in industrial and commercial businesses that we would like to facilitate over the course of the planning period. This goal is in alignment with the results of the City's community survey which showed significant interest from residents in seeing new businesses come to Sumas.

Chapter 9 – Climate Change and Resiliency Element.

This is a brand-new chapter added to the Comprehensive Plan. The main focus of HB 1181 (2023) was to require the development of a new element dedicated to highlighting and addressing the jurisdiction's current and future climate change conditions. As the bill requiring this element was passed in 2023, Whatcom County and the cities therein are amongst the first jurisdictions in the State to need to implement this element. Because of this, guidance from the State on how to develop this element is sparse and preliminary. HB 1181 requires the inclusion of two sub-elements: resiliency and greenhouse gas emissions. The greenhouse gas emissions sub-element is only required for cities with at least 6,000 population, so Sumas was not required to include that sub-element.

The resiliency sub-element was created with the Whatcom County Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan (NHMP) at its core. The NHMP looks at several forms of natural hazards, such as flooding, earthquakes, liquefaction, landslides, volcanoes, wildfires, mine hazards, and tsunamis and compares it against the vulnerability of critical facilities in each of the communities in the County. Using the results of the Sumas portion of the NHMP, City staff prioritized which critical facilities were the most vulnerable to which hazards. City staff also identified which communities in Sumas were the most vulnerable and developed a list of goals and policies with the purpose of providing guidance on how to further make Sumas as resilient to climate hazards as possible.

Chapter 10 – Shoreline Management Element.

This chapter directly connects to Sumas' Shoreline Master Program (SMP) most recently updated in 2023. In previous iterations of this Comprehensive Plan, the goals and policies identified in the SMP were copied and placed into this chapter. However, those goals and policies are quite numerous and take up a lot of unnecessary space at the back of the Comprehensive Plan. For this reason, City Staff have decided to adopt by reference the goals and policies of the SMP. This way, the City does not have to include all the goals and policies in the Comprehensive Plan, saving file space and resources.