



February 2025
Benton County Comprehensive Plan Update



Public Participation Plan – Comprehensive Plan Update

Prepared for Benton County

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FINAL

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Public Participation Plan

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ABBREVIATIONS

County	Benton County
GMA	Growth Management Act
PPP	<i>Benton County Public Participation Plan</i>
RCW	Revised Code of Washington

1 Introduction and Overview

The Benton County Public Participation Plan (PPP) includes guidelines and procedures for early and continuous public participation related to the Growth Management Act (GMA; Revised Code of Washington RCW 36.70A) and Benton County's (County) planning processes for the periodic update of the County's Comprehensive Plan and Development Regulations. Common communication strategies are characterized, along with specific strategies, as applicable.

This PPP is intended to guide and form the basis for public participation. The County will comply with this PPP and the County's approved January 2024 PPP, which provides overall guidance to County public involvement efforts. This 2026 Comprehensive Plan PPP is consistent with the County's more general PPP but provides additional detail on recently updated state requirements and how outreach efforts will target input and participation from disadvantaged and underserved areas in Benton County. Updates and amendments to the Plan and development regulations are necessary to reflect current laws, local needs, new data, correct errors, and/or clarify intent.

As the planning process develops, it should be expected that deviations from the PPP may be warranted, and the GMA recognizes such deviation may occur per RCW 36.70A.140 provided the spirit and procedures of the PPP are observed.

The periodic update cycle was changed in 2022 by the Washington State Legislature by the approval of HB 1241 which changed the recurrence from eight to ten years after the 2024-2027 update cycle. Other new laws were passed by the State Legislature changing Growth Management Act planning and local regulation requirements that apply to the 2024-2027 and future periodic update cycle such as:

HB 1220 – Counties and cities/towns must plan for and accommodate, rather than encourage the availability of emergency and affordable housing

HB 1717 – New regulations for cities and counties to include local and regional tribes in planning processes and decisions

HB 2001 – Expands the ability to build tiny houses

SB 5042 – Changes the initial effective date of certain actions under the GMA

SB 5118 – Supports successful reentry for juveniles, amending the definition of "essential public facilities"

SB 5235 – Increasing housing unit inventory by removing arbitrary limits on housing

SB 5275 – Enhances opportunity in Local Areas of More Intense Rural Development or LAMIRDS

SB 5368 – Encourages rural economic development

SB 5593 – Allows a county to make revisions to a UGA boundary to accommodate patterns of development

SB 5818 – Promoting housing construction in cities through amendments to and limiting appeals under SEPA and GMA.

2 Public Participation Goals and Objectives

The County recognizes the importance of early and continuous public participation to adequately reflect the County's residents' input. The goal of the PPP is to make all residents of the County aware of the Comprehensive Plan update process and identify opportunities for providing public input. Taken individually, the activities are not expected to reach and inform each and every resident of the County. Collectively, however, the plan activities are designed to effectively and efficiently provide broad-based dissemination of information and maximize opportunity for resident involvement and comment.

The following goals for public input are incorporated into the decision-making process:

- Provide interested parties with timely information, an understanding of the process, and multiple opportunities to review and comment on proposed amendments to the Comprehensive Plan.
- Actively solicit information from residents, property owners, and stakeholders about their concerns, questions, and priorities for the 2026 Comprehensive Plan update process.
- Encourage interested parties to informally review and comment on proposed changes to the Comprehensive Plan throughout the process and provide those comments to decision makers.
- Provide forums for formal public input at project milestones prior to decision-making by local officials.
- Consult and consider input from neighboring jurisdictions; federal, state and local agencies; and Native American tribes.

3 Public Meetings and Communications

The following are key meetings, workshops, and open houses that will be hosted by the County and the Benton County Planning Commission to encourage outreach and public involvement throughout the Comprehensive Plan review process:

- **Open House.** Benton County will host one or two public open houses in 2025 to inform the public on the 2026 Comprehensive Plan review and update process, progress to date, and next steps.
- **Planning Commission Meetings.** Upon completion of preliminary drafts of updated Comprehensive Plan elements, the Benton County Planning Commission will receive presentations at one or more of their regular scheduled meetings on the updated information, typically at least quarterly. Opportunity for public questions and input will be provided at these meetings.
- **Coordination with State Agencies.** Coordination will be conducted with Washington State Departments of Commerce, Ecology, and Fish and Wildlife, and other interested tribes, and federal, state and local agencies to keep them informed of plan development progress and to solicit their comments early in the Comprehensive Plan periodic update process. Copies of the environmental review documentation, which will be a draft environmental impact statement (EIS), will also be provided to the public and affected tribes and agencies for review and comment as part of the plan review and adoption process.
- **Public Hearing and Formal Comment Periods.** Once the final draft Comprehensive Plan update elements are completed, a formal public review will be conducted under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) (RCW 43.21C) including a draft SEPA EIS public comment period, local public hearing and then final action by the Board of Benton County Commissioners. All comments received during the public hearing and public comment period will be compiled and considered for inclusion in the Comprehensive Plan.
- **Develop and Maintain an Interested Parties List.** Identify interest groups such as the following and share information with these groups and others who request to be on the list:
 - Agencies and organizations included on the County’s SEPA distribution list
 - Interested parties list from most recent Comprehensive Plan Update
- **Underserved and Disadvantaged Targeted Outreach Strategy.** Targeted outreach activities will include communications focused on disadvantaged community areas within Benton County. Communications will be provided in English and Spanish, and we will also seek to enlist the support of one or more community organizations to assist in getting the message out on opportunities to provide perspectives and input on the project elements and broader Comprehensive Plan update process-related questions and concerns, as applicable.

Benton County Planning Division staff will place legal notices of hearings and comment periods in the County's official paper, currently the Prosser Record Bulletin. Hearing notices will be published at least 15 days prior to the hearing and shall include the date, time, location and purpose of the hearing. Legal notifications notifying dates and times of open houses and public hearings and comment periods will be distributed to the public via email, and other public postings. Notices will also be provided on the Planning page of the County website and the Comprehensive Plan Update website: [2026 Comprehensive Plan Update - Benton County WA](#)

The Planning Commission will be the primary forum for detailed review and recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners. Interested parties are encouraged to attend and provide comments during the Planning Commission/Board of County Commissioners workshops, open houses, and public hearings. All meetings and hearings before the Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners will be audio recorded, and the audio recording will be available on the Planning Commission's Agenda page on the County's website. Meeting minutes also will be made available on the Planning Commission's Agenda page on the County's website.

Public workshops will be held generally quarterly in conjunction with the project, along with one or two public open houses. These public meetings will include sharing information on the draft Comprehensive Plan content along with other relevant and related information.

4 Public Involvement and Outreach Strategies

Described below are key strategies developed to encourage outreach and public involvement throughout the Comprehensive Plan update process. Implementation of these strategies is expected to generate meaningful public participation.

4.1 Website

The County's Comprehensive Plan page on the Planning Division's website: [2026 Comprehensive Plan Update - Benton County WA](#) will include a Comprehensive Plan update page. This site will provide a public forum for obtaining Comprehensive Plan update information, including but not limited to the following:

- Status updates
- Meeting notices and agendas
- Draft documents and maps
- An email address for submitting public comments
- An interested party sign up link

4.2 Communications

An email distribution list will be maintained for individuals and groups who wish to receive periodic project announcements, public notices of upcoming public meetings, and other comprehensive planning and development codes update-related information. Those interested in being included on the email distribution list should contact the Benton County Planning Division. Additionally, the County will conduct the following activities:

- The Planning Division will issue news releases announcing the public meeting and hearing times, dates and locations to the local media.
- Public Notice of all public hearings and adoptions will be published under "legals" in the classified section of the Official County Newspaper at least 15 days in advance of the hearing.
- All meetings and hearings before the Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners will be audio recorded.
- All people desiring to speak or submit written comments will be allowed to do so at all meetings and hearings before the Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners or during designated comment periods.
- Benton County may utilize one- or two-page information sheets to facilitate the dissemination of public information.

4.3 Methods for Reaching Disadvantaged and Underserved Areas

Outreach to seek input and participation from disadvantaged and underserved areas in Benton County will be addressed as part of the planning process. A portion of Benton County's population are in disadvantaged communities because of climate change (including changes in wildfire risk), environmental health, affordable housing and potentially other factors (based on a national Climate Justice Screening Tool). This project will primarily focus on areas potentially impacted by climate change risks for disadvantaged communities. Notifications will be conducted through a variety of media to maximize awareness and details about public workshops and open house times and locations, and other opportunities for input.

Efforts to reach vulnerable populations:

- Provide Spanish language outreach materials to Hispanic communities.
- Spanish language interpreter at public open houses.
- Outreach to affected Tribes as applicable.
- ADA-compliant access at public meetings.
- When practical, make presentations, documents, and maps accessible to people with disabilities.

4.4 Work Products

The 2026 Comprehensive Plan website will be updated with documents as they become available. Hard copies will be available for the cost of reproduction upon request from the Benton County Planning Division.

4.5 Public Comment

Interested parties will be encouraged to provide comments to the County by letter or email. All comments will be forwarded to the Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners. The 2026 Comprehensive Plan update webpage will be the central repository for information under consideration.

The Planning Commission will conduct a public comment period on the draft Comprehensive Plan and EIS and hold at least one public hearing to solicit input on the Plan update. The Board of County Commissioners will hold one public hearing before final adoption. The County will coordinate with the Department of Ecology on public notification of comment periods and hearings to take advantage of Ecology's optional Comprehensive Plan amendment process that allows for a combined state-local comment period (WAC 173-26-104).

5 Public Involvement, Implementation and Documentation

5.1 Public Participation Timeline

The following is a general timeline including anticipated public participation opportunities. Benton County will coordinate with the Washington State Department of Commerce throughout the process.

- Public Open Houses – Fall 2025
- Planning Commission workshops tentatively planned for every quarter
- SEPA Public Scoping Meeting – April 8, 2025, at the Planning Commission meeting
- Planning Commission Hearing with County/State combined public comment period on draft Comprehensive Plan Amendments/draft SEPA EIS – Spring 2026
- County Commission and State Agency adoption by June 30, 2026

5.2 Documentation

All public outreach efforts and the results of those efforts will be documented in the administrative record maintained by the County. Documentation will include invitation letters and responses, meeting and hearing notices, meeting materials, meeting notes with attendance and comments received, draft and final work products, and other information as applicable.