

# YAKIMA COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

## Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, December 10, 2025, at 5:30 PM

Location: Warehouse Theatre Company

1610 South 24th Ave, Yakima, WA 98902

## DRAFT for Approval

**I. Call to Order:** Chair – Commissioner Doug Mayo called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM and requested the roll call:

### Attendance and Quorum

- Present: Doug Mayo (Chair) and Holly Castle (remote), Martinez (joined remotely at 5:47 PM), Mike Shuttleworth, Jerry Craig (in-person)
- Not Present: Commissioner Isidra Sanchez - excused absence.
- Staff: Olivia Story, Keith Wolf, Aaron Cohen, Nellie Soptich (Water Resources),
- Public/Agency Staff: Scott Downes – WDFW and John Marvin, Yakama Nation

## II. Meeting Opening & Administrative Business

### Approval of Minutes - November 19, 2025

Chair Mayo noted he was not present at the November 19, 2025, meeting. Discussion occurred regarding whether a quorum was present for the vote, as only four commissioners were initially present. Commissioner Martinez joined the meeting during the vote at 5:47 PM completing the quorum.

Motion: To approve the November 19, 2025, meeting minutes as presented

Vote: 4-0-1 (Approved; Mayo abstained as he was not present at that meeting)

## III. Public Comments

No public comments were received on topics other than those on the agenda.

## IV. New Business

### A. LRN2025-00009 - Chapter 9: Utilities Element

Presenter: Olivia Story, Long Range Planning Manager

Olivia presented the periodic update to the Utilities Element of the Comprehensive Plan (Horizon 2046). The chapter addresses infrastructure systems including electricity, natural gas, telecommunications, solid waste, water supply, and wastewater/stormwater management.

#### Key Discussion Points:

- Growth Management Act Requirements: The utilities element must include general locations, capacities, and types of utilities needed to serve current and future development over the 20-year planning period.
- Electricity Infrastructure: Pacific Power and Puget Sound Energy serve the county. The chapter addresses renewable energy integration, grid reliability, climate adaptation, and distributed generation systems.

- Telecommunications: Expanded coverage for broadband, fiber optic, and wireless services. Recognition of telecommunications as essential infrastructure for economic development, education, healthcare, and emergency services.
  - Solid Waste Management: Regional approach through collaboration with cities. Emphasis on waste reduction, recycling, composting, and proper hazardous waste disposal. Recognition of solid waste management's role in climate action.
  - Water Supply: Critical importance given drought conditions affecting irrigation in the Yakima Basin. Policy emphasis on conservation, efficient distribution, protection of water rights, and coordination with irrigation districts.
  - Climate Adaptation: Integration of climate resilience considerations across all utility systems, including preparation for extreme weather events, drought, wildfire impacts, and changing precipitation patterns.
- Intergovernmental Coordination: Extensive coordination required with multiple entities including cities, irrigation districts, public utility districts, private utilities, and state/federal agencies.

## **B. LRN2025-00003 – Chapters 3: Natural Hazards Element**

*Comprehensive Plan Element Chapters 2 and 3: Document Review Methodology:*

Staff explained the color-coded editing system used consistently across all comprehensive plan element chapters:

- BLACK TEXT = No change from previous version (retained content)
- BLUE UNDERLINED TEXT = New or updated content (additions and modifications)

~~RED-STRIKETHROUGH~~ = Deleted content (stricken/removed text)

Change Categories: The rationale for the updates to Chapters 2 and 3 were organized into four primary categories:

- Category 1: Updated based on new information as of 2025 (including recent hazard events, updated mapping, infrastructure improvements)
- Category 2: Updated based on Best Available Science requirements (incorporating climate science, hazard modeling, engineering studies)
- Category 3: Updated based on HB 1181 Resiliency and Sustainability requirements (climate adaptation, resilience planning, vulnerability assessments)
- Category 4: Updated based on reconciliation or restructuring of YCC Titles 16C (Critical Areas Ordinance), 16D (Shoreline Master Program), and 22 (Flood Hazard Management)

Policy Statistics: Staff reported that Chapter 3 contains 123 total policies, of which, 90 are new policies added through this update process. This represents approximately 73% new content, reflecting the substantial expansion of hazard mitigation planning required by state law and necessitated by climate change impacts.

*Chapter 3: Presenter: Nellie Soptich, Program Analyst*

Nellie presented comprehensive updates to the Natural Hazards Element updating the existing Chapter with narrative and policy and goals emanating from ESHB 1181 (2023) climate resilience requirements and Growth Management Act hazard mitigation mandates and updated regional information on flood hazards, projects and future initiatives.. The chapter addresses flooding, wildfire, drought, extreme heat, geologic hazards, multi-hazard interactions, and disaster recovery.

*Key Discussion Points:*

- Flooding and Stormwater Management:
  - Updated flood hazard mapping to reflect climate-informed projections beyond current 100-year and 500-year floodplains

- Integration with Yakima County Flood Control Zone District programs and Comprehensive Flood Hazard Management Plans
- Climate-adjusted stormwater design standards accounting for increased precipitation intensity, soil saturation, and post-wildfire conditions
- Green infrastructure prioritization include: bioretention, permeable pavements, and natural drainage preservation
- Wildfire Hazard Mitigation:
  - Recognition of escalating wildfire risk due to climate change, drought, and fuel accumulation
  - Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) protection strategies including defensible space requirements, fire-resistant construction, vegetation management, and access standards
  - Post-fire hazards including debris flow, erosion, water quality impacts, and compromised infrastructure
  - Coordination with Yakima County Fire and Life Safety Division, Washington Department of Natural Resources, and U.S. Forest Service
- Drought and Water Supply Resilience:
  - Critical aquifer recharge area protection with enhanced regulations to support drought resilience
  - Low Impact Development (LID) requirements for infiltration preservation, clustered development, soil compaction prevention, and natural drainage maintenance
  - Recognition of declining snowpack, earlier spring runoff, and reduced summer stream flows
  - Water conservation, efficiency improvements, storage enhancement, and managed aquifer recharge strategies
- Extreme Heat Hazards:
  - Best Available Science application using climate-adjusted temperature projections, heat wave frequency modeling, and local heat vulnerability assessments
  - Identification and mapping of extreme heat hazard areas including urban heat islands, areas with inadequate tree canopy, neighborhoods with limited cooling access, and high concentrations of heat-vulnerable populations
  - Heat mitigation strategies including urban forestry, cool surfaces, building design standards, and cooling center access

Protection measures for vulnerable populations including outdoor workers, elderly residents, low-income households, and those with pre-existing health conditions.
- Geologically Hazardous Areas:
  - Updated mapping and regulation of landslides, erosion hazards, steep slopes, drainage issues, and alluvial fan flooding
  - Climate change impacts on slope stability including increased precipitation intensity, soil saturation, and post-wildfire conditions
  - Development standards including geotechnical assessments, setback requirements, drainage control, and structural measures
- Multi-Hazard and Cascading Risks:
  - Recognition that multiple natural hazards can occur simultaneously or in sequence (e.g., drought leading to wildfire followed by flooding and debris flows)

- Integrated risk assessment approaches considering compound and cascading hazard scenarios
- Comprehensive emergency management coordination across multiple hazard types
- Disaster Recovery Planning:
  - Recovery plan implementation framework for post-disaster response, damage assessment, rebuilding, and long-term adaptation
  - Build Back Better principles to increase resilience during reconstruction
  - Streamlined permitting procedures while maintaining compliance with regulations

#### *Commissioner Discussion:*

Commissioners discussed implementation challenges, resource requirements, and coordination mechanisms needed to effectively implement the comprehensive hazard mitigation framework.

Questions focused on:

- Balance between hazard mitigation and property rights
- County capacity and staffing requirements for expanded hazard planning
- Coordination with cities, special districts, and other jurisdictions
- Funding mechanisms for hazard mitigation projects and programs
- Timeline for implementing policy changes through code amendments

Staff responded that the comprehensive plan establishes the policy framework and vision, while the detailed implementation will occur through ordinance updates scheduled for early 2026. This phased approach allows for thorough review of regulatory language while maintaining the policy direction established in the comprehensive plan.

No substantive changes to the proposed Chapter 3 changes/additions were requested by the Commissioners

## **C. LRN2025-00002 - Chapter 2: Natural Settings Element**

*Presenter: Keith Wolf, Long Range Planner*

Keith provided narrative and policy and goal REDLINE/BLUELINE changes for review and comment.

- Five critical area types: wetlands, critical aquifer recharge areas (CARAs), fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas, frequently flooded areas, and geologically hazardous areas
  - Protection required by Growth Management Act using Best Available Science
  - Integration with Shoreline Master Program (Title 16D) for shoreline jurisdiction
- Wetlands Protection:
  - Four-tier rating system based on functions, values, and sensitivity to disturbance
  - Protection of ecological functions including water quality improvement, flood storage, groundwater recharge, habitat provision, and biodiversity support
  - Updated science regarding wetland ecology, climate change impacts (altered hydrology, habitat shifts, invasive species), and restoration techniques
- Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas (CARAs):
  - Updated mapping using best available hydrogeologic data from Washington State Department of Ecology publications and local studies
  - Wellhead protection areas, susceptible groundwater management areas, sole source aquifer protection, and vulnerable aquifer recharge zones

- Development restrictions to prevent infiltration reduction through impervious surfaces, soil compaction, contamination, and disruption of natural flow paths
- Connection to drought resilience and water supply sustainability
- Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation:
  - Stream corridor protection for anadromous fish (salmon, steelhead) and resident species
  - Priority habitats and species identification using Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife data
  - Riparian buffer requirements, flow regime protection, water quality maintenance, and habitat connectivity
  - Climate adaptation considerations including temperature increases, altered flow regimes, and habitat shifts
- Surface Water Quality and Quantity:
  - Yakima River Basin water rights, Bureau of Reclamation Yakima Project operations, tribal treaty rights, and integrated water resource management
  - Protection of springs, seeps, riparian corridors, hyporheic zones, and cold-water refugia critical for fish survival
  - Natural and managed flow regimes are essential for maintaining ecological functions, recognizing climate change impacts including declining snowpack, earlier peak flows, reduced summer base flows, and increased winter flows
- Climate Resilience Integration:
  - Best Available Science requirements include climate projections from University of Washington Climate Impacts Group, NOAA models, USGS data, and peer-reviewed literature
  - Climate-informed critical areas protection accounting for changing precipitation patterns, temperature increases, drought frequency/severity, wildfire impacts, and ecosystem shifts
  - Adaptation strategies including nature-based solutions, equitable resource distribution, and consideration of vulnerable populations
- Monitoring and Adaptive Management:
  - High-Definition Change Detection using remote sensing, GIS analysis, and field verification to track critical area conditions
  - Monitoring program to assess effectiveness of critical area regulations and identify necessary adjustments
  - Adaptive management framework allowing regulatory refinements based on monitoring results and updated science
- Policy Structure: The chapter contains 183 total policies with 91 new policies addressing updated scientific understanding, HB 1181 climate requirements, and reconciliation with YCC Titles 16C, 16D, and 22. Policies are organized into eight goal areas covering critical areas protection, water quality/quantity, fish/wildlife habitat, air quality, and major opportunities.
- Best Available Science Update Process:
  - Science Advisory Group (SAG) formation with representatives from federal agencies (U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Forest Service), state agencies (WA Dept. of Ecology, WA Dept. of Fish and Wildlife), Yakama Nation, and technical experts (~12 core members recruiting 12-15 subject matter experts)
  - Interactive science portal under development to organize research, literature, data sources, and citations

- Timeline: SAG kickoff January 2026, research/drafting through May, review June-August, final report October 2026
- Seven priority topic areas: ephemeral/intermittent streams, riparian buffers, wetland ratings, climate adaptation, geologic hazards, groundwater/aquifer protection, monitoring frameworks
- Commissioner Questions: Commissioners inquired about coordination with agriculture, property rights considerations, implementation timelines, and resource implications. Staff emphasized that the comprehensive plan provides policy direction, while Critical Areas Ordinance amendments (scheduled for 2026) will establish specific regulations. Staff noted that reasonable accommodations provisions, economic viability considerations, and voluntary incentive programs are included to balance environmental protection with land use flexibility.
- General Discussion: Commissioners discussed the extensive scope of updates across all three chapters. Staff confirmed that the 2026 work plan includes approximately 13 Planning Commission sessions and 26 Board of County Commissioners sessions to address the comprehensive plan update, code amendments, and adoption process. Final adoption scheduled for November-December 2026.
- Best Available Science Integration: Staff emphasized that the chapter incorporates current scientific understanding from the University of Washington Climate Impacts Group, NOAA models, USGS data, and other credible sources. Climate projections inform all hazard planning policies.
- Regulatory Implementation: Staff noted that the comprehensive plan provides policy direction, while detailed regulations will be established through updates to:
  - Critical Areas Ordinance (YCC Title 16C) - scheduled for work sessions in January/February 2026
  - Shoreline Master Program (YCC Title 16D) - scheduled for work sessions in January/February 2026
  - Flood Hazard Management (YCC Title 22) - scheduled for work sessions in January/February 2026

The following changes/modifications were/are being made based on comments.

1. Page 7: Line 1: Add: Irrigation Districts and City of Yakima.
2. Page 31-32: Resources Areas clarified and links to Development Code
3. Page 49: Need to include current/future FEMA status discussion. Keith identified the staff will be meeting with Yakima County Emergency Management in the next couple of weeks to discuss Natural Hazard preparation and the changes to the Comp. Plan within the context of changing environmental conditions over the period of the Plan update (2026-2046).
4. General: Update def. for “Green Infrastructure.” Keith identified the concepts of Nature-Based v. Geoengineered actions.
5. General: Power Point correction “water quantity v. water quality.” Keith explained that both are used but the Chapter needs to make sure the two are clearly identified and used in the specific sections accurately. Both are generally used in the Chapter 3 Critical Area – Aquifer Recharge sections and “water quantity” is new and reflects the opportunity to develop policy and guidelines for Managed Aquifer Recharge, for example, to improve over basin resiliency and suitability for drought and flood control in a changing physical environment.

## V. Unfinished Business

None.

## VI. Communications

### A. Status Report - Board of County Commissioners Actions

#### *Agritourism Ordinance Update*

Olivia provided an update on the Agricultural Tourism Operations ordinance that had been previously reviewed by the Planning Commission. Chair Mayo had repeatedly requested this update. The Board of County Commissioners adopted the ordinance with substantial modifications from the Planning Commission's recommendations.

Background: The agritourism project originated to ensure that agricultural tourism operations (wineries, breweries, distilleries, farm-to-table venues) operating on agricultural lands were in compliance with county regulations and that regulations appropriately addressed these uses. A Tourism Advisory Group met over many months and developed recommendations that went to the Planning Commission for review and recommendation, then to the Board of County Commissioners for adoption.

Key Changes Adopted by BOCC (different from Planning Commission recommendations):

- Minimum Acreage: Reduced from 5 acres (Planning Commission recommendation) to 1 acre
- Road Maintenance Agreement: Requirement removed. Board indicated property owners and road community can work out agreements independently without county mandate
- Facility Size Limits: Removed previous requirements of 1,500 sq ft and 10,500 sq ft depending on level of agritourism operation. Board determined that 1-acre minimum provides natural buffer and buildable area limitations make specific square footage caps arbitrary
- Attendee Caps: Eliminated attendee limits. Planning Commission had recommended 150 person cap. Board removed all attendance limitations except that events exceeding 499 attendees trigger additional requirements

Documentation Provided: Ms. Story provided commissioners with the adopting ordinance, a table showing item-by-item vote counts from the BOCC hearings, the Planning Commission's original recommendations, and the final adopted ordinance showing all modifications. Hard copies will be made available to commissioners upon request.

Appeal Period: The ordinance has been adopted and entered the appeal period, which will conclude February 11, 2026.

Commissioner Response: Chair Mayo thanked staff for the update and indicated he would pick up hard copies of the documentation when convenient.

## VII. Secretary's Report

None.

## VIII. Next Meetings and Adjournment

Next Scheduled Meetings:

- January 14, 2026, 5:30 PM - Location TBD
- January 28, 2026 - Special Meeting (if needed, Virtual)

- February 11, 2026, 5:30 PM - Location TBD

#### Looking Ahead - 2026 Work Plan:

Staff noted that the 2026 calendar includes 13 Planning Commission sessions scheduled from January through August, covering comprehensive plan elements (Chapters 1-12), Yakima County Code updates (4-5 titles), and Best Available Science updates.

Planning Commission hearings on all comprehensive plan elements scheduled for August 2026.

Board of County Commissioners will conduct 26 sessions for study sessions and final adoption scheduled for November-December 2026.

Planning Commission will typically meet twice per month during this period, with regular meetings in-person (with virtual option) and second meetings virtual only.

#### **Adjournment:**

Motion: To adjourn the meeting

Vote: 5-0 (Approved)

The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:48 PM.

Minutes approved by the Planning Commission on \_\_\_\_\_.

Signed:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Planning Commission, Chair