



San Juan County Planning Commissioners
135 Rhone Street
Friday Harbor, WA 98250
Submitted via email to: compplancomments@sanjuanco.com

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Dear San Juan County Planning Commissioners,

With the realities of climate change and its likely local impacts in mind, on behalf of the members of Friends of the San Juans, I respectfully submit to you **a new Element for San Juan County's Comprehensive Plan: The Climate Change Element**. In the spirit of Friends' long-term partnership with San Juan County's planners and planning efforts, we are pleased to bring our expertise in science, policy, and the law — particularly as they relate to local climate science — to bear in support of strong, forward-thinking, climate-friendly policies for San Juan County. To create this, we worked with community members, other organizations, and former Planning Commissioners. You'll find this Climate Change Element to be sensible, straightforward, and easy to support.

As our community plans for San Juan County's future, resiliency in the face of the coming changes must be a priority — by adopting this Climate Change Element as part of the Comp Plan Update, you will take a practical and significant step toward ensuring the long-term vitality of our human and natural communities.

Why is a separate Climate Change Element needed for San Juan County's Comp Plan?

In short, the climate language that's in the current draft of the Comp Plan isn't enough. When the Planning Commission debated the idea of a separate climate Element in early 2021, the hope was that interspersing climate-friendly policies throughout the Comp Plan's various elements would be sufficient — unfortunately, while the proposed policies in the current Comp Plan draft are a good start, more is needed. By adding a separate Climate Change Element to its Comp Plan, San Juan County addresses bigger-picture needs that cannot be successfully handled in piecemeal fashion throughout the Plan. For instance, the first of the nine policies in this Climate Change Element states, *It is a primary policy of San Juan County to avoid increasing climate change*. This big-picture statement, in addition to being good common sense, does not fit neatly into any of the other Elements in the Comp Plan.

Is it legal to add a new Element to our Comp Plan?

Yes. In fact, Whatcom and Snohomish Counties have already created new Elements for their Comp Plans that address concerns about climate and the environment. Per the Growth Management Act, the legal requirement is simply that any new Element in a Comp Plan must relate to “physical development” in the County. Development in San Juan County must prioritize reducing sprawl and conserving natural resources, so the connections between development and climate action are abundantly clear.

Where did the language in the new Climate Change Element come from?

Wherever possible, the Friends team and its partners adapted language from other documents that the County has already published. For instance, the County’s Home Rule Charter and the County Council’s climate resolution, 20-2020, were used as primary sources. (You’ll find the specific references in the footnotes.) Therefore, adopting this Climate Change Element is not breaking any new ground — the County is simply taking its own, already-adopted language and fully incorporating it as formal goals and policies in its long-range planning document, the Comp Plan.

I love it! What are the next steps to make this happen?

At its June 17th meeting, the Planning Commission can simply approve this common-sense Climate Change Element for inclusion in the County’s Comp Plan Update. From there, the Climate Change Element will become part of the final “hearing draft” of the full Comp Plan Update. The public will have a chance to weigh in on it (as part of the entire Comp Plan), and from there it will be considered for approval by the County Council.

Thank you! If I can answer any questions or provide the Commissioners with any additional information, please don’t hesitate to reach out to me.

Respectfully,



R. Brent Lyles, Executive Director

***Proposed
Climate Change Element
for the San Juan County Comprehensive Plan.***

CLIMATE CHANGE ELEMENT

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

The people of San Juan County, Washington, recognize the interdependence between a healthy community, a resilient economy and a vibrant natural world.¹

The people of San Juan County, Washington, have declared our commitment to a safe and inclusive community, resilient economy, flourishing ecosystem and sustainable environment.²

The people of San Juan County, Washington, value the natural world and the beauty that surrounds us, and the climate and ecosystems of our county, including air, water, soil, and the region's remarkable biodiversity. We recognize the need for responsible stewardship of our county for the good of both our community and nature, including the protection and preservation of public lands and undeveloped lands and the strong enforcement of codes and regulations.³

In 2008, the Washington State Legislature recognized climate change poses a serious threat to the economic wellbeing, public health, natural resources and the environment. And therefore directed the Department of Ecology, in consultation with the University of Washington, to assess and make recommendations on greenhouse gas emissions reductions.⁴

The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), representing over 2,500 climate scientists and thirty years of research, has concluded that global warming caused by greenhouse gas emissions of human activities is the most pressing challenge facing the world today.⁵

The IPCC determined human activities have already caused approximately 1 °C of global warming above pre-industrial levels and is likely to reach 1.5°C between 2030 and 2052 if it continues to increase at the current rate of approximately 0.2°C per decade due to past and ongoing emissions (IPCC, 2018 Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5°C).⁶

Changing weather patterns and ocean conditions are significantly impacting the health and viability of native terrestrial, fresh water, and marine ecosystems, damaging human infrastructure, and triggering climate refugee crises across the globe.⁷

¹ San Juan County Home Rule Charter, Preamble.

² San Juan County Home Rule Charter, Declaration of Community Values.

³ San Juan County Home Rule Charter, Declaration of Community Values.

⁴ San Juan County Council Resolution 20-2020.

⁵ San Juan County Council Resolution 20-2020.

⁶ San Juan County Council Resolution 20-2020.

⁷ San Juan County Council Resolution 20-2020.

Cooperating governments throughout the world have adopted emission reduction targets and programs to keep global warming well below the 2°C increase, in an effort to reduce catastrophic impacts of climate change and ultimately sustain all life on Earth;⁸

San Juan County and its community has led efforts to protect its environment, educate its residents and visitors, and support a sustainable local economy in an effort to maintain a resilient Island-based community, ranking 1st in State of Washington and 50th nationwide of resilient counties according to the Climate Resilience Screening Index (EPA600/R-1 7/238, October 2017).^{9 10}

San Jan County was the first Leave No Trace county in the United States, hosts approximately a million visitors from around the world annually, and strives to have positive impact beyond its borders.¹¹

Physical development within San Juan County both affects, and is affected by, climate change.

This Climate Change Element of the Comprehensive Plan is a necessary and appropriate means of addressing climate change, consistent with the San Juan County Home Rule Charter, prior policies adopted by the County Council, and the Vision statement for the Comprehensive Plan.

1.2 GOALS

Goal 1: Physical development within San Juan County shall not increase climate change.

Goal 2: Physical development within San Juan County shall be sited, designed, and implemented to avoid negative impacts from climate change upon the development.

1.3 POLICIES

Policies:

1. It is a primary policy of San Juan County to avoid increasing climate change.
2. It is a primary policy of San Juan County to avoid negative impacts of climate change upon development and infrastructure.

⁸ San Juan County Council Resolution 20-2020.

⁹ San Juan County Council Resolution 20-2020.

¹⁰ See also, Islands Climate Resilience, 2017, Working toward Climate Resilience in the San Juan Islands.

¹¹ San Juan County Council Resolution 20-2020.

3. All goals and policies stated in each Element of the Comprehensive Plan, and all codes and regulations adopted to implement these goals and policies, shall be interpreted and implemented in a manner to give greatest effect to avoid increasing climate change, and to best protect existing and future development and infrastructure from the impacts of climate change.
4. The County will pursue efficient use, conservation, and protection of natural resources through promotion of voluntary measures, and adoption of codes and regulations requiring conservation measures in the siting, design, and implementation of physical development.¹²
5. The County will pursue minimization of waste and recycling of materials through promotion of voluntary measures, and adoption of codes and regulations requiring adoption of waste minimization and recycling measures in the siting, design, and implementation of physical development.¹³
6. The County will pursue strong enforcement of codes and regulations relating to climate change, and will provide adequate funding for enforcement officers and prosecutors.¹⁴
7. The County will pursue reduction of the carbon footprint of development through promotion of voluntary measures, and adoption of codes and regulations requiring energy-efficient siting, designs, and materials for physical development and access/transportation to development sites.^{15 16}
8. The County will pursue renewable/sustainable energy independence through promotion of voluntary measures, and adoption of codes and regulations requiring use of renewable energy sources wherever possible.¹⁷
9. The County will avoid adverse impacts of climate change upon development and infrastructure through promotion of voluntary measures, and adoption of codes and regulations requiring consideration and planning for the effects of climate change in determining locations for development and infrastructure.¹⁸

¹² See San Juan County Home Rule Charter, Declaration of Community Values.

¹³ See San Juan County Home Rule Charter, Declaration of Community Values.

¹⁴ See San Juan County Home Rule Charter, Declaration of Community Values.

¹⁵ See San Juan County Council Resolution 20-2020.

¹⁶ Islands Climate Resilience, 2017, Working toward Climate Resilience in the San Juan Islands, p. 40.

¹⁷ See San Juan County Council Resolution 20-2020.

¹⁸ Islands Climate Resilience, 2017, Working toward Climate Resilience in the San Juan Islands, p. 29.