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2025 Comprehensive Plan Talking Points

Central Themes:

- The comprehensive plan is a once-a-decade chance to set how our communities grow.
- We want to make our communities equitable, affordable, livable, vibrant, and green.
- Advocating for increased density, more housing, and better transit connectivity in our cities and towns is how we protect farmland and wildlife habitat from sprawl.
- These comprehensive plans are the first to comply with new requirements in the Growth Management Act for housing affordability, climate change, and sprawl prevention. These plans are the most significant comprehensive plan updates since the GMA was first passed in 1990.

Overall Messaging Tips:

- Use plain language instead of jargon whenever possible (homes vs. supply, pollution vs. emissions)
- Make clear that the current situation is due in part to policy choices made in the past that we can change through the comprehensive plan process
- Focus on storytelling about impacts on people and places
- Connect the comprehensive plan update to fiscal responsibility, efficient and economic public facilities and services, and economic prosperity
- Position more housing choices in the urban growth area as a way to fight displacement and keep people in their community of choice while protecting rural areas from sprawl and overdevelopment

Housing

(h/t to WNN and Sightline)

- Meet people where they're at: housing costs are too high
- Connect housing shortage to costs increases: a shortage of housing options is driving up prices, pushing homes out of reach for regular people
- Emphasize people who are impacted in the community – teachers, nurses, service workers, farmworkers, etc.



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- Be specific about what new kinds of homes will be allowed under comp plan changes, like duplexes, backyard cottages, apartments
 - Tell the story of how people will be better off with new changes – housing stability promotes community well-being and economic growth

Climate

- From wildfires and drought to flooding and sea level rise, we know that we need to take action in now to secure a climate-resilient future for Washingtonians from Aberdeen to Walla Walla and the many rural towns and big cities we are proud to call home.
- Neighborhoods designed for cars instead of walking and transit lead to increased traffic, pollution, and high gas prices.
- Transportation accounts for 40% of Washington state greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. That's why reducing vehicles miles traveled (VMT) is such an important strategy to achieve emissions reductions.
- Cities and towns play a crucial role by creating vibrant accessible neighborhoods that provide parks, jobs, schools, and restaurants that don't require long drives, or driving at all. In particular, encouraging walkable, bikeable, transit-accessible neighborhoods benefits communities and families while reducing carbon emissions.
- As we reduce emissions, we must also plan for resilience by protecting lands that buffer our communities against the worst effects of climate change. Cities and counties can use smart planning to reduce and prevent the impacts of wildfire, drought, sea level rise and flooding on our communities, including by identifying "hot spots" where these disasters are more likely in the coming years.

Rural and Natural Resource Lands

Keeping Rural Lands Rural

- Rural places across Washington have housing needs and affordability concerns just like anywhere else in the state. The supply-side strategies that we need to adopt in our urban and suburban cities and towns can also work in cities and towns in rural areas that need more housing.
- However, those supply side strategies do not work in rural and natural resource lands outside of the cities and towns in those areas. We can't build urban or suburban levels of density in our rural areas outside cities and towns without destroying what defines these communities as rural.

Promoting Fiscal Responsibility

- Building more housing in rural areas outside cities and towns increases other costs that our rural communities can't afford. Running new infrastructure for water, sewer and
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stormwater to serve increased density in rural areas runs up the bill for local and state government. Instead of subsidizing sprawl, we should be prioritizing public dollars to support infrastructure improvements that promote walkability and connections to transit and clean air and water.

Working Farms and Forests

- Washington's economy depends on our state's working forests, farms, and other natural resource lands. While the Growth Management Act has reduced the conversion of these lands to sprawl, this conversion continues. We need to better protect working forests, farms, and other natural resource lands to protect our economy, produce healthy local food, and to absorb greenhouse gas pollution.

Fish and Wildlife Habitats

- Salmon, steelhead, orcas, and other fish and wildlife make Washington special. While the Growth Management Act has helped protect these habitats and water quality we have learned more and must do better to protect this heritage for our children and their children.
- Salmon and other treaty-protected fishes are an important cultural resource for Washington tribes. Responsible land use policy can conserve the instream flows that sustain our salmon runs and protect riparian habitat from pollution and overdevelopment.

Tribal Treaty Rights

- Significant portions of treaty protected lands and resources are managed under the GMA. It's important that our local comprehensive plan updates protect tribal cultural resources.
- Our local comprehensive plans influence the availability and affordability of housing in communities where tribal people live which is particularly critical where on-reservation housing is in short supply. (*refer to Housing section above*)

