



## WHATCOM COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

5280 Northwest Drive  
Bellingham WA 98226

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### AGENDA FEBRUARY 12, 2026

The Whatcom County Planning Commission will hold a **hybrid** meeting at 6:00 p.m., with the option to attend remotely or in person at 5280 Northwest Drive, Bellingham.

- Call to Order
- Roll Call
- Flag Salute
- Department Update
- Open Session for Public Comment
- Commissioner Comments
- Approval of Minutes for – January 22, 2026
- Meeting Topic – Annual Business Meeting
  - Election of Officers
  - Review of Business Rules
  - Other Comments or Concerns
- Unfinished Business / New Business
- Adjournment

**NOTE:** For information on how to watch and participate in the meeting in real time, please visit the following web page: [Participate in Virtual Planning Commission Meeting](#)

*Individuals who require special assistance to participate in the meetings are asked to contact "PDS\_Planning\_Commission@co.whatcom.wa.us" at least 96 hours in advance.*

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*There are nine members on the Whatcom County Planning Commission. If you will be giving written information to the Commissioners, please give a copy to the Coordinator for our office files.*

*For more information please contact Aileen Kogut-Aguon at (360)778-5935 or PDS\_Planning\_Commission@co.whatcom.wa.us  
5280 Northwest Drive, Bellingham WA 98226*



**RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE  
WHATCOM COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION  
JANUARY 22, 2026**

Public Hearing and Work Session

1

1 **Call to Order**

2 The meeting was called to order by Whatcom County Planning Commission Chair,  
3 Kelvin Barton at 6:00 p.m.

4 **Roll Call**

5 **Present:** Kelvin Barton, Suneeta Eisenberg, Rud Browne, Jim Hansen, Daniel Dunne,  
6 Dominic Mocerri, Scott Van Dalen,

7 Nicholas Greif arrived at: 6:37 p.m.

8 **Absent: Julie Jefferson**

9 **Staff Present:** Mark Personius, Matt Aamot, Lucas Clark, Maddie Schacht, Lauren  
10 Clemens and Aileen Kogut-Aguon

11 **Department Update**

12 Mark Personius, Director of Planning and Development Services (PDS), stated that  
13 tonight is the final Comprehensive Plan public hearing for the Commission before  
14 moving it on to County Council. He noted that staff have regularly updated Council  
15 throughout the Comp Plan process. Council will be discussing Chapter 4: Capital  
16 Facilities and Chapter 5: Utilities at their next meeting. Mr. Personius finished his  
17 update stating there are two Commission seats vacant as of January 31<sup>st</sup>, noting that  
18 Commissioner Van Dalen has reapplied and has been approved by Council for a second  
19 term.

20 **Open Session Public Comment**

21 There was no public comment.

22 **Commissioner Comments**

23 There were no Commissioner comments.

24 **Approval of Meeting Minutes**

25 **Timestamp: 6:08p**

26 **1 Commissioner Dunne moved** to approve the meeting minutes from December 4<sup>th</sup>,  
27 11<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>, 2025.

28 **Commissioner Van Dalen seconded.**

29 **Roll Call Vote: Ayes- Hansen, Mocerri, Van Dalen, Browne, Dunne, Eisenberg,**  
30 **Barton**

31 **(Ayes- 7; Nays- 0; Abstain- 0). The motion carried.**

32 **Final Comprehensive Plan Update**

33 **Timestamp: 6:09p**

34 Matt Aamot, PDS Senior Planner, provided a brief overview of the Comprehensive Plan  
35 Update, including the discussion to date and the proposed changes sent to the  
36 Commission regarding Appendix I (Housing Needs Analysis) and Appendix A  
37 (Glossary).



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1 **a) Public Hearing**

2 **Timestamp: 6:11p**

3 Peter Frazier, Dan Tucker, Chris Secrist, Matt Lloyd, Coleman Hoyt, Brian Gass,  
4 Dwayne Engelsman, Peter Condyles, Craig Zimmerman, David Parsons, Bridget Bryk,  
5 Bill Geyer, and Perry Eskridge provided public comment.

6 **b) Work Session**

7 **Timestamp: 6:53p**

8 Commissioner Browne asked about where Heavy Industrial Impact (HII) is mentioned  
9 in Policy 2U-9.

10 **2 Commissioner Browne moved to strike Policy 2U-9.**

11 **Commissioner Van Dalen seconded.**

12 Commissioner Browne explained his reasoning for striking out policy 2U-9, stating that  
13 both HII and the Light Impact Industrial (LII) Zoning Districts are needed to support  
14 affordable housing and employment growth. He emphasized the importance of a  
15 broader countywide discussion on industrial zoning that considers the needs of both  
16 businesses and residents, rather than focusing on a single area.

17 The Commission noted the need to provide alternatives that balance housing and  
18 employment growth throughout the county without downzoning existing HII areas.

19 Commissioner Browne stated that striking out the policy now would solve the problem  
20 of double land supply, and then the Commission can revisit this issue in the future.

21 Commissioner Mocerri expressed that including language in the Comprehensive Plan  
22 acknowledging the need for a future discussion on industrial zoning is preferable to  
23 omitting the issue entirely and removing the policy.

24 **Amendment: Commissioner Dunne moved to amend Policy 2U-9 to say:**  
25 *“Coordinate with the City of Bellingham in evaluating benefits and costs of*  
26 *existing or proposed industrial zoning in the Bellingham UGA and seek additional*  
27 *industrial zoning sites countywide in coordination with the Whatcom County*  
28 *Industrial Lands Study (July 2025).”*

29 **Commissioner Browne seconded.**

30 **Roll Call Vote: Ayes- Mocerri, Van Dalen, Browne, Dunne, Eisenberg,**  
31 **Greif, Hansen, Barton**

32 **(Ayes- 8; Nays- 0; Abstain- 0). The motion carried.**

33 **Roll Call Vote: Ayes- Van Dalen, Browne, Dunne, Eisenberg, Greif, Hansen,**  
34 **Browne, Barton**

35 **(Ayes- 8; Nays- 0; Abstain- 0). The motion carried.**

36 **Timestamp: 7:12p**

37 **3 Commissioner Mocerri moved to adjust the definition in Appendix A (Glossary) to**  
38 **match the definition in Chapter 2 on Urban Community Forests to read:**



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Public Hearing and Work Session

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1 "Urban and community forests include vegetated areas on lands in urban growth  
2 areas. Specifically, this includes any land with trees and associated vegetation,  
3 whether it's planted or naturally occurring, used or unused, and includes areas along  
4 roads, utilities, and forested watersheds within populated zones. Designate urban and  
5 community forests on public land greater than 5 acres with over 75% tree canopy."

6 **Commissioner Van Dalen seconded.**

7 **The motion was withdrawn.**

8 **Timestamp: 7:23p**

9 **4Commissioner Dunne moved** to remove Urban and Community Forest definition  
10 from Appendix A (Glossary).

11 **Commissioner Van Dalen seconded.**

12 Commissioner Mocerri asked where the definition originated.

13 Mr. Aamot stated it came from an RCW that is unrelated to the Growth Management  
14 Act (GMA). The GMA states that the county needs to designate these areas, but  
15 provides no definition for the term, and does not provide direction on what to do with  
16 designated areas.

17 **Roll Call Vote: Ayes- Van Dalen, Browne, Dunne, Eisenberg, Greif, Barton**

18 **Nays- Hansen**

19 **Abstain- Mocerri**

20 **(Ayes- 6; Nays- 1; Abstain- 1). The motion carried.**

21 **Timestamp: 7:26p**

22 Commissioner Mocerri asked about the data for Appendix I (Housing Needs Analysis)  
23 and the proposed amended language that was sent to the Commission regarding  
24 emergency shelter beds.

25 Mr. Aamot explained that the data for the Land Capacity Analysis for emergency  
26 housing beds, a new GMA requirement, was received from a couple of the cities prior  
27 to the meeting. Staff is proposing to add:

28 *A land capacity analysis was conducted for each UGA to compare the total*  
29 *emergency shelter beds needed in the UGA to the land capacity for such*  
30 *beds. These analyses show that there is adequate land capacity to accommodate*  
31 *the emergency shelter beds allocated to each UGA."*

32 Commissioner Dunne expressed his concern on adding the language before seeing the  
33 land capacity analysis data.

34 Commissioner Dunne discussed the public comment from Futurewise, explaining that  
35 they would appeal the Comp Plan on Agricultural (AG) lands and the lack of low-  
36 income housing.

37 Commissioner Mocerri asked about Columbia Valley LII zoning in the Foothills Subarea  
38 Plan in Exhibit B of the packet.



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Public Hearing and Work Session

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1 Mr. Aamot stated that staff is proposing to update the Foothills Subarea plan, with  
2 related rezoning the area north of Limestone Rd. in the existing Columbia Valley UGA  
3 from Rural Forestry (RF) to LII, to potentially add employment opportunities for the  
4 area. He added that General Commercial (GC) Zoning District would be expanded by  
5 5-acres to avoid split zone parcels, and some Urban Residential 4 units per acre (UR-4)  
6 would be rezoned to Urban Residential Medium density 6-units per acre (URM-6). This  
7 change would align with House Bill 1220, allowing multifamily housing.

8 **5Commissioner Mocerri moved** to update the Foothills Subarea Plan map to match  
9 the proposal for the Columbia Valley UGA Map 2-3, and modify Policy CVI-D, number  
10 1, to read: *Mitigate traffic impacts and address infrastructure/ utility/service needs*  
11 *through the land division and development permitting process.*

12 **Commissioner Browne seconded.**

13 **Roll Call Vote: Ayes- Browne, Dunne, Greif, Mocerri, Van Dalen, Barton**

14 **Nays- Eisenberg, Hansen**

15 **Abstain- (Ayes- 6; Nays- 2; Abstain- 0). The motion carried.**

16 **Timestamp: 7:37p**

17 **6Commissioner Browne moved** to approve his letter as revised and attach it to the  
18 *Comprehensive Plan update.*

19 **Commissioner Dunne seconded.**

20 Commissioner Browne stated that if the Comprehensive Plan is approved without this  
21 restriction for Bellingham and Blaine, it will cause less affordable housing, raising taxes  
22 for housing by 3,000 dollars per household.

23 Chris Behee, Bellingham Long Range Planning Division Manager, clarified that the \$133  
24 million funding gap identified for Bellingham came from the land capacity analysis and  
25 noted that the proposed 220 market-rate units, without subsidy, would address that  
26 gap. He stated that Bellingham's plan does not propose a \$3,000 per-household tax  
27 increase and that such an approach would not be feasible.

28 Commissioner Mocerri expressed concern with the wording in the first paragraph of the  
29 letter, specifically the phrase "rejecting the Comprehensive Plan" based on the  
30 Bellingham and Blaine proposal. He stated that the language should reflect that the  
31 Commission is recommending approval of the Comp Plan, with the caveat that Council  
32 re-evaluates Bellingham and Blaine's proposal first.

33 **Amended language for the first paragraph:** The Whatcom County Planning  
34 Commission recommends that you require the Cities of Bellingham and Blaine  
35 adopt reasonable measures (as defined by the Growth Management Act) to  
36 amend their plans to meet their obligations under the GMA.

37 **Roll Call Vote: Ayes- Dunne, Mocerri, Van Dalen, Browne, Barton**

38 **Nays- Greif, Hansen**

39 **Abstain- Eisenberg (Ayes- 5; Nays- 2; Abstain- 1). The motion carried.**

40 **Timestamp: 8:09p**



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Public Hearing and Work Session

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1 **7Commissioner Barton moved** to recommend the 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update  
2 to Council with the associated findings.

3 **Commissioner Van Dalen seconded.**

4 Commissioner Hansen stated that he opposes the motion because this plan side steps  
5 the GMA and will cause sprawl. He agrees with Futurewise that there needs to be  
6 changes in the UGAs.

7 Commissioner Greif expressed his gratitude to the Commission for their hard work in  
8 getting through the Comp Plan, and his thoughts on the GMA and the jurisdictions  
9 proposals.

10 **Roll Call Vote: Ayes- Eisenberg, Greif, Mocerri, Van Dalen, Browne, Dunne,**  
11 **Barton**

12 **Nays- Hansen**

13 **(Ayes- 7; Nays- 1; Abstain- 0). The motion carried.**

14 **Timestamp: 8:14p**

15 **8Commissioner Mocerri moved** to direct Staff after the adoption of the  
16 Comprehensive Plan by the County Council to do a full audit of costs associated  
17 with the Comprehensive Plan update, including staff time and consultants and  
18 present the results to the Planning Commission.

19 **Commissioner Dunne seconded.**

20 **Roll Call Vote: Ayes- Greif, Hansen, Mocerri, Van Dalen, Browne, Dunne,**  
21 **Eisenberg, Barton**

22 **(Ayes- 8; Nays- 0; Abstain- 0). The motion carried.**

23 **Timestamp: 8:17p**

24 **Other Business**

25 **Timestamp: 8:17p**

26 Mr. Personius presented Commission Chair Barton with a plaque and certificate of  
27 completion for serving 10 years on the Commission, with 6 years as Chairman.

28 **Adjournment**

29 **Timestamp: 8:20p**

30 The meeting was adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

31 Minutes prepared by Aileen Kogut-Aguon.

32 WHATCOM COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION ATTEST:

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34

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chair

\_\_\_\_\_  
Aileen Kogut-Aguon, Coordinator

**BUSINESS RULES  
PLANNING COMMISSION OF WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON**

**Article I. Planning Commission of Whatcom County.**

1.1 Creation, Name, and Purpose

- A. The Planning Commission of Whatcom County, Washington, was constituted by resolution of the Board of County Commissioners, adopted February 21, 1961, pursuant to Chapter 36.70, Revised Code of Washington.
- B. The Whatcom County Planning Commission, may be referred to as the "Commission" or the "Planning Commission."
- C. The purpose of the Planning Commission is to provide citizen review and recommendations on planning related matters to the County Council.
- D. The Planning Commission shall assist the Planning and Development Services Department in carrying out its duties as stated in Whatcom County Coded 2.31.025.

1.2 Regular Meetings.

- A. In accordance with the priorities of the Planning Department and the County Council, Planning Department staff shall set agendas and schedule meetings for the Planning Commission.
- B. The Planning Commission typically meets twice a month ~~from~~ 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. on the second and fourth Thursday of each month except in August, November, December where the Planning Commission meets once a month; and shall provide for additional meetings.
- C. All Commission meetings will be held in compliance with the State Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA) (Chapter 42.30).

**Commented [AK1]:** This addition is just to have the time in writing as we do are best to end our meetings by 9 p.m.

1.3 Special Meetings.

Special meetings may be called by order of the Chair, or in the Chair's absence, by the Vice-Chair; or by written request of three Commissioners.

1.4 Quorum.

- A. In accordance with WCC 2.03.100 more than one-half of the total number of filled voting positions shall constitute a quorum, and a quorum is required, for the transaction of business.
- B. In accordance with RCW 42.30.020 a meeting cannot be conducted if there is less than a quorum. At any meeting where there is less than a quorum, the Commissioners present shall have authority to establish a future meeting date and adjourn the meeting.

1.5 Voting.

- A. The Planning Commission requires a simple majority of those present for approval.
- B. In accordance with RCW 36.70.600 and RCW 36.70.400 the affirmative vote of not less than a majority of the total members of the commission is statutorily required on comprehensive plan and official controls.
- C. A roll call vote is required on matters which require a public hearing and on matters referred by the County Council, or upon request of any member.
  - i. The roll call procedure is to rotate through the alphabetical list of Commissioners and start each new roll call vote with the next name on the list, carrying the next starting position over to the following meeting.

D. Irrespective of section C-*i*, in roll call votes, the Chair shall always vote last.

## Article II. Commissioners and Officers

### 2.1 Number of Commissioners, Tenure, and Qualification.

- A. The Planning Commission shall consist of nine Commissioners who are residents of the county.
- B. Commissioners shall be appointed and confirmed by a majority of the County Council.
- C. The term of office for the Commissioners appointed by the County Council shall be four years; and shall be in accordance with WCC 2.03.030.
- D. The Commission shall be representative of the county with no more than two Commissioners from each council district.

### 2.2 Conflict of Interest

In addition to complying with State law, the following guidelines shall be followed:

- A. A Commissioner experiencing a conflict of interest shall abstain from voting on the matter, keep out of any deliberations on the matter, and leave any chamber in which such deliberations are to take place. A Commissioner shall not discuss the matter privately with any fellow officials. The reasons for the Commissioner's abstention from voting, for good and sufficient reasons, shall be announced to the Commission upon call of any Commissioners.
- B. An individual Commissioner should use discretion in discussing with the applicant for a specific land use, or others interested in the application, any request before the Commission on which Commissioners will vote, and should avoid committing to any specific course of action regarding the outcome of the hearing. Answering questions relating to time, place, and Commission procedures and policies is permissible.
- C. If a Commissioner personally receives written information from a citizen or group regarding an upcoming agenda item, the Commissioner shall immediately deliver that item, or a complete copy thereof, to the Planning and Development Services Department for inclusion into the record of public testimony.

### 2.3 Vacancies.

A Commissioner selected to fill a vacancy shall serve for the un-expired term of the predecessor for that position.

### 2.4 Hybrid Meetings

While hybrid meetings (in-person / on-line) are permitted, Commissioners are encouraged to attend regularly scheduled meetings in-person, when possible. When attending virtually, Commissioners if possible, shall have their cameras on, ensuring that their faces, including their mouths, are visible and well-lit in the videoconferencing window, as stated in WCAG 5.1 Holding Accessible Remote Meetings, following the Washington State policy USER-01 from the Washington State Office of Equity. are encouraged to have their video cameras on.

### 2.5 Excessive Absences.

Four consecutive absences per year may be grounds for recommending removal of a Commissioner to the County Council.

### 2.6 Compensation.

Commissioners shall not receive any salaries for their services

### 2.7 Officers

The officers of the Planning Commission are: Chairperson and Vice-chairperson. The Planning and Development Services Coordinator will act as ~~Secretary~~ Coordinator to the Commission.

**Commented [AK2]:** As of April 2026, Whatcom County is required to follow the ADA standards as directed by the WA State Office of Equity, with the direction of the DOJ's [Final Rule](#). All Countywide Communication Specialists are referring to the WCAG as guidance for all ADA requirements.

2.8 Elections.

- A. Officers shall be elected annually by the Planning Commission at its first meeting in February.
- B. In the event of a vacancy in the office of Chair, the Vice-Chair automatically succeeds to the Chair.
- C. An acting Chair may be elected by the Commissioners present, to serve during the absence of the officers from any meeting.

2.9 Removal.

- A. Any officer may be removed by the Commission whenever in its judgement the best interests of the department would be served. A majority vote of current Commissioners shall be required to remove any officer.

A vacancy in the officers automatically occurs upon the third consecutive absence of an officer from the regular monthly meetings without leave from the Commission.

2.10 Chairperson.

- A. The Chair is the chief executive of the Commission, has all the powers and duties usually incidental to such office, and is responsible to appoint committees and to conduct the business of the Commission between regular meetings.
- B. The Chair shall discharge all duties incidental to the office of Chairperson and as prescribed by the County Council or the Planning Commission; the Chairperson shall preside at all meetings of the Commission.

2.11 Vice-Chairperson.

- A. The Vice-chairperson shall assist the Chairperson in the discharge of the Chairperson's duties as the Chairperson may direct and shall perform such other duties as may be assigned by the Chairperson or by the Planning Commission.
- B. The Vice-Chair assumes the responsibilities of the Chair in the Chair's absence or disability with all the power of, and subject to all restrictions upon, the Chairperson.
- C. A vacancy occurring in the office of Vice-Chair is filled by election of a replacement to serve for the un-expired portion of the term.

2.12 ~~Secretary~~Coordinator

The ~~Secretary~~Coordinator is responsible to keep a public record of all transactions, findings, and determinations of the Commission; prepare the agenda of each meeting; provide notice of meetings to the Commissioners; arrange proper and legal notice of hearings; and attend to the correspondence of the Commission and to such other duties as are normally carried out by a ~~Secretary~~Coordinator.

**Commented [AK3]:** "Secretary" is not a position at PDS. This change is to make it consistent with all of the documents and correspondence that comes from PDS Coordinators.

**Article III. Meeting Process**

3.1 Notice – Agenda

The ~~Secretary~~Coordinator will mail or deliver a copy of the agenda to each Commissioner on or before the Thursday preceding the regular meeting day. Notice of the time, place, and agenda for continued or special meetings shall be given as far as possible in advance, provided that notice by telephone shall suffice in the event of an emergency.

3.2 Order of Business

The regular order of business shall be is as follows:

- a) Call to Order
- b) Roll Call
- c) Determination of Quorum
- d) Flag Salute
- e) Department Update
- f) Open Session for Public Comment
- g) Commissioner Comments
- h) Disposition of Minutes

- i) Public Hearings / Work Sessions
- j) Unfinished Business
- k) New Business
- l) Adjournment

### 3.3 Open Session for Public Comment

- A. The public may speak to the Planning Commission for three minutes on any topic, except items that are scheduled on the agenda for a public hearing that same day.

### 3.4 Parliamentary Procedure

- A. Matters of procedure shall be governed by applicable County and State statutes and these Business Rules, or Roberts Rules of Order. The Commission has an obligation to be as clear and simple in its procedure as possible, and therefore, may avoid the finer points of parliamentary rules.
- B. The Commission may by majority vote on a yearly basis elect a parliamentarian to advise the Commission about correct procedure.

### 3.5 Meetings – Decorum of Debate

- A. Any Commissioner desiring to speak shall first be recognized by the chair, and shall confine their remarks to the specific subject under consideration or to be considered. The Commissioner who has proposed a motion or the committee member who has presented a report shall be allowed the first opportunity to explain the motion or report, and usually is allowed to speak last on it. No Commissioner or small group of members shall be permitted to monopolize the discussion on a question. If a Commissioner has already spoken and other Commissioners wish to speak, they should be recognized in preference to the Commissioner who has already spoken on a question.
- B. When two or more Commissioners desire to speak at the same time, the chair shall name the Commissioner who shall have the floor.
- C. When a Commissioner is speaking, no other Commissioner shall hold discourse which may interrupt the speaker except to raise a point of order. The chair should insist that every Commissioner be attentive to the business before the assembly.
- D. Commissioners shall have time to explain any motion they intend to make. All motions will begin with the words, "I move" and must receive a second prior to being put to a vote.
- E. When it appears that all Commissioners who wish to speak have done so, the chair shall inquire, "Is there any further discussion?" If there is not, the question is put to a vote.
- F. To bring a question to immediate vote, a Commissioner may move to close debate. If more than one motion is pending, the motion to close debate should specify the pending motions to which it applies (main motion, motion to amend, etc.). The motion to close debate cannot interrupt a speaker, is not debatable, and requires an affirmative vote by two-thirds of the commissioners in attendance. The motion to close debate should be used in moderation, as Commissioners cannot be expected to maintain interest in an organization if they are frequently denied the right to participate in its deliberations.

### **Article IV. Order of Business - Hearing and Work Session Procedure**

All hearings are to be open to the public and shall meet legal requirements as to publication, posting, timing, and number of public notices. Hearing procedures shall be as follows:

- A. Chair opens the hearing and states the subject of the hearing.
- B. Chair asks the Commissioners to declare conflicts of interest.

- C. The Planning and Development Services Director or their designee shall present a summary introduction (staff report) of the factual background of the subject for the information of the Commissioners.
- D. After the staff report, the Chair, at the Chair's discretion, may invite the proponent of a land use application, or their designee, to make a brief presentation regarding their application. This presentation shall be limited to 15 minutes, which includes rebuttal time.
- E. Chair outlines rules for the presentation of public testimony, including:
  - i. During an open session or public hearing, audience members will be given three minutes to address the commission. Individuals in the room will be given the opportunity to speak first, followed by individuals joining online.
  - ii. Cell phones shall be silenced and cell phone conversations shall be prohibited within the confines of the conference room during meetings.
  - iii. Placards, signs, applause, or other distractions shall not be allowed in the room without the consent of the commission chair.
  - iv. Any person making personal, impertinent, or slanderous remarks, or who become boisterous while attending a Commission meeting, may be requested to leave the meeting and may be forthwith, by the presiding officer, barred from further audience before the Commission during that meeting.
  - v. The Chair opens the hearing to public comment, starting with individuals in the room, and proceeding to individuals online.
  - vi. The Chair will recognize the approach, at any time, of the Commission's legal counsel to comment on legal or procedural issues.
- F. After public comment is complete, the Hearing will then be closed by the Chair who will indicate to the public the procedure to be followed by the Planning Commission. In no case shall a decision be reached by the Commission before a hearing is closed. If for any reason, a hearing cannot be completed at a single session, the adoption of a motion to continue the Hearing to another time shall be deemed sufficient legal notice to all parties who may be affected.
- G. Following the close of the Hearing, a Commissioner may motion action on the subject of the hearing, or motion to continue to discuss the subject at a work session. A motion for continuation should include a time and date for discussion of the subject. Such work sessions that do not follow immediately at the close of the Hearing shall have public notice as required by law.
- H. During work sessions, input from the public shall only be allowed in response to direct questions from Commissioners. New testimony is not to be received. The Chair should ensure that each member has the opportunity to state their opinions at least once before the discussion is closed.
- I. A work session is completed with either a vote on a particular motion regarding the matter at hand, or a majority vote for the continuation of the subject to another meeting. A motion for continuation should include a time and date for discussion of the subject.

## **Article V. Reporting**

### **5.1 Reporting to County Council**

The Planning and Development Services Director, or the Director's designee, shall report the majority-voted recommendations of the Planning Commission to the County Council or appropriate Council Committee.

### **5.2 Commissioner Representation to County Council**

It is assumed that the Planning Commission meeting minutes, as well as the recorded findings of fact, will sufficiently speak for the Commission's recommendations to the County Council. A Planning Commissioner who wishes to represent the Commission in front of the County Council or a Council Committee regarding a particular matter for clarification of the Commission's deliberations must have an affirmative vote of the Commission.

### 5.3 Addressing County Council

- A. Any Commissioner voting in the minority on an issue may write a "Minority Opinion", labeled as such, to be included in the documentation going to the County Council for their deliberations on the Planning Commission recommendation. The correspondence should be in the form of a letter to the Council, and may be signed by those voting in the minority. This effort may only be expended by individual Commissioners without the assistance of the Planning and Development Services staff.
- B. Any Commission member may address the County Council on any issue as an individual citizen, and not on behalf of the Commission. A Commissioner may address the County Council on behalf of the Commission only with an affirmative vote of the Commission.

## Article VI. Other Advisory Board Procedures.

### 6.1 Amendments to Rules.

These rules may be amended by majority vote during the Business Meeting. They may also be amended at any regular meeting with four days written notice.

### 6.2 Records.

- A. Actions of the Commission requiring written execution, such as formal resolutions, may be drawn up by the ~~Secretary~~-Coordinator after the action has been taken; and the signatures of the Chairman and ~~Secretary~~ Coordinator shall be sufficient to validate such resolutions or document.
- B. Minutes shall contain a complete record of motions, resolutions, and other determinations of the Commission; and shall also contain the usual details of time, place, type of meeting, Commissioners and officers present, speakers, records of roll call votes and other information deemed appropriate by the ~~Secretary~~Coordinator. Minutes shall be signed by the ~~Secretary~~-Coordinator when prepared and validated by the signature of the Chair after approval by the Commission.
- C. Maps, reports and other documents constituting an integral part of the minutes may be identified by reference, provided such exhibits are properly numbered and filed for the public record.
- D. The ~~Secretary~~-Coordinator is responsible for sending each Commissioner a copy of the minutes in a timely manner with ensuing agenda.
- E. The Planning Commission shall keep, at the Planning Department, minutes of the proceedings of meetings and a record with the names and addresses of Commissioners. All Planning Commission records are subject to the Open Public Records Act (RCW 42.17).

By majority vote on February 13, 2025, the Planning Commission of Whatcom County, adopted these rules with all amendments consolidated to date.

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~~Kelvin Barton~~, Chair

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Aileen Kogut-Aguon, ~~Secretary~~Coordinator

# Digital Accessibility

On this page, we strive to list resources that have no cost or low cost, especially tools compatible with what people already have and use. We aim for this to support members of the public and state workers who may be working under limited budgets, or facing other limitations. Additional resources exist outside of this page that may have additional cost and additional features/benefits. Resources listed here may change. This page was last updated on: January 29, 2026.

## *What is the state requirement?*

- ◆ [Digital Accessibility Policy | WaTech](#)

Who is WaTech?

WaTech is a Washington state agency that sets the technology standard for state government agencies.

Their Digital Accessibility Policy is called "USER-01," and was previously called "OCIO Policy #188," so you may see that previous name in older state documents. Our office recently helped revise and renew this policy.

It is important to continue to include community voices, especially by those impacted by accessibility as those closest to the problem are closest to the solution. If you are interested, please contact us at [access@equity.wa.gov](mailto:access@equity.wa.gov).

- ◆ These guidelines are called the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#) and called WCAG (pronounced "wick-Ahg") for short. Specifically, Washington state agencies are currently required to meet WCAG 2.1 AA.
  - The "2.1" refers to the version of WCAG. Before 2.0, was 1.0.
  - "AA" refers to the level of criteria.
  - We will incorporate components from new versions, such as WCAG 2.2, as they are developed and consider our capacity as well as the voices of people with disabilities.

# What's the federal requirement?

- ◆ [Fact Sheet: New Rule on the Accessibility of Web Content and Mobile Apps Provided by State and Local Governments | ADA.gov](#)

## Deadlines

- ◆ **April 2026** - This is the compliance deadline for [WA State policy USER-01](#), which refers to the Accessibility Standard, [USER-01-01-S](#), requiring a minimum level of compliance of WCAG 2.1 Level AA for the technology we present to customers (the public).
- ◆ **May 11, 2026** for the two HHS (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) rulings, which impacts internal as well as public-facing, for entities of 15 or more employees who receive any federal funding -- with some caveats.
- ◆ **July 1, 2026** - By this date, the Accessibility Standard requires a minimum level of compliance of WCAG 2.2 AA.
- ◆ **July 1, 2029** – In addition to the technology required to be accessible by April 2026, the policy requires content and tools that employees use to perform their job duties (internal) meet the same standard. This is the longer-term deadline under WaTech's State Digital Accessibility Policy, which applies to **internal employees-facing technology** used by employees to perform job duties.
  - This anticipates future alignment with **Title I of the ADA**, should the DOJ issue a similar rule.
- ◆ **In Summary:**
  - The immediate compliance date is **April 2026** for content for the public.
  - The longer-term target is **July 2029** for internal systems, or websites that state workers use to do their jobs.

# Accessibility of Remote Meetings

W3C Group Note 22 July 2022



## ▼ More details about this document

### This version:

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### Feedback:

[GitHub w3c/remote-meetings](#) (pull requests, new issue, open issues)

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## Abstract

This document summarizes considerations of accessibility that arise in the conduct of remote and hybrid meetings. Such meetings are mediated, for some or all participants, by real-time communication software typically built upon Web technologies. Issues of software selection, and the roles of meeting hosts and participants in providing access are explained. Relevant [W3C](#) documents are referred to, where applicable, as sources of more detailed and in some instances normative guidance.

Whereas the [RTC Accessibility User Requirements \[raur\]](#) address the design of the underlying technologies and software, the present document examines the accessibility of remote and hybrid meetings from a larger perspective. It is recognized that the accessibility of a meeting experience to participants with disabilities depends on a variety of conditions, only some of which are ensured by the design of the software used. Further conditions need to be put in place as part of the process of organizing and conducting the meeting itself, including the appropriate application of features offered by the meeting software as well as the preparation and advance distribution of accessible supporting documents.

## Status of This Document

*This section describes the status of this document at the time of its publication. A list of current [W3C publications](#) and the latest revision of this technical report can be found in the [W3C technical reports index](#) at <https://www.w3.org/TR/>.*

This is a draft document that provides accessibility guidance on the use of remote meeting platforms in particular scenarios. Given increased reliance on different forms of remote interactions during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is vital to ensure accessibility of all kinds of remote interactions for people with disabilities, and to rapidly work to improve accessibility support in these technologies.

This document looks at the different processes and audiences associated with remote and hybrid meetings. This includes procurement considerations, platform development considerations, the accessibility of materials used during meetings and the use of accessibility features during meetings by hosts and participants.

This document was published by the [Accessible Platform Architectures Working Group](#) as a Group Note using the [Note track](#).

Group Notes are not endorsed by [W3C](#) nor its Members.

This is a draft document and may be updated, replaced or obsoleted by other documents at any time. It is inappropriate to cite this document as other than work in progress.

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This document is governed by the [2 November 2021 W3C Process Document](#).

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## § 1. Definitions

For consistency and clarity, the following terms are used throughout this document, as defined here.

### § 1.1 Remote meeting

*Remote meeting* is an umbrella term used to describe real-time discussions or presentations held between two or more parties online. Other related terms often used include virtual meetings, online meetings, online presentations, and video conferencing. Webinars can also be considered remote meetings, however the interaction between presenter and attendee may be restricted.

A remote meeting generally requires the use of an online meeting platform on an online device such as a computer, smartphone or digital assistant that allows participants to interact with each other. Typical features of remote meeting platforms include the use of audio communication via an online microphone or traditional telephone, video communication via an online camera, a chat feature for text-based communication and the ability to share content. This can include the sharing of a participant's computer screen, the sharing of an on-screen presentation with media-rich content such as slides and videos, and the transferring of files. In addition, remote meeting platforms generally have the ability for participants to allocate a meeting host who controls the features that are available to other participants.

### § 1.2 Types of remote meeting platforms

There are a number of different platform delivery types. These include, but are not limited to

#### **Standalone client**

This includes a specific web portal or app where the primary purpose is to provide a remote meeting. Examples include Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Cisco WebEx.

#### **Conference or event platform**

This platform provides remote meeting functionality alongside additional content such as the ability to register for a conference, view exhibitors and follow social media feeds.

### **Educational platform**

This provides remote meeting functionality within a Learning Management System (LMS) for educational purposes such as the addition of a discussion board and learning materials. In these instances the standard remote meeting features are available for the real-time presentation aspects, with the extended functionality providing additional features designed to be an equivalent to a real-world experience.

### **Medical platform**

The delivery of remote meeting functionality within a medical platform such as telehealth facilities or to assist with medical procedures.

### **XR platform**

This is an immersive remote meeting platform where immersive XR environments are used as real-time, virtual meeting places.

### **Hybrid meeting**

Hybrid meetings feature a combination of participants using remote meeting software combined with two or more people physically located in a meeting room.

## 2. Accessibility context

In broad terms, the accessibility requirements of standard remote meeting delivery rely on three distinct elements:

- The accessibility of the remote meeting platform;
- The accessibility of content that is shared during the meeting; and
- The accessibility awareness of host and participants when the remote meeting is taking place.

The accessibility challenges faced by people with disabilities participating in remote meetings will depend on how these three elements interact. An example that highlights the challenges across these three areas is the provision of captioned video. Suppose that a prerecorded video is to be played to meeting participants as part of a live presentation. In the case of the remote meeting platform, if captioned video playback is not implemented in the software then the tool fails the WCAG requirement. If the tool can support the playback of captioned video but the video itself does not have captions, the same accessibility issue occurs but for a different reason. Additionally, if both the meeting platform can support the display of captions, and the content contains captions, there is still the possibility that the host does not know how to enable the captions for viewing by all participants, leading to the accessibility issue occurring through yet another mechanism.

While the playback of captioned video highlights a consistent issue across all three elements, the barriers faced by people with disabilities will vary depending on the implementation of accessibility requirements and current limitations of remote meeting software. For example, interface elements for a remote meeting platform can be made operable for screen reader users, but content presented by screen sharing is unlikely to be available due to the way in which visual content is typically transferred as graphical data rather than in a form that can be readily processed by assistive technology. As such, specific guidance is needed for software developers, content producers and users respectively to ensure that best practice in remote meeting delivery is achieved. Hybrid meetings add another layer of complexity whereby audio, video and the distribution of meeting materials need to be accessible to all participants regardless of whether they are physically or remotely attending the meeting.

While [WCAG](#) has applicable guidance across several standards and Notes relating to real-time communication and XR, it is this level of complexity that this document endeavours to address. In each instance, the level of responsibility for accessibility is different: for the remote meeting tool, guidance is required for developers of the platform. For presentation materials used during a remote meeting, the responsibility is with the content producer. If both of these elements cater effectively for people with disabilities, the final responsibility is with the host to ensure the accessibility features are enabled, or best efforts are made to ensure current limitations of the medium are overcome. In the case of hybrid meetings, there may be a shared responsibility between the online meeting host and the host of the physical meeting attendees.

For organisations considering these factors, there is also a need to explore appropriate procurement solutions. With the accessibility of remote meeting platforms varying considerably, it is an important consideration that accessibility criteria are prioritized when selecting a platform.

## § 3. Meeting Platform Selection and Development

This section summarizes [WCAG](#) guidance relevant to the selection and development of remote meeting software (i.e., meeting platforms) supporting users' access needs. Additional suggestions that extend beyond existing [WCAG](#) guidance are also included.

### § 3.1 Selecting an accessible remote meeting platform

Organizational roles associated with procurement will need carefully to examine the accessibility support and features in remote meeting software before committing to its purchase. The following guidance can help to identify which remote meeting platforms support accessibility requirements.

Persons responsible for procuring or selecting a platform on which to conduct remote meetings should

- Ensure that the platform has a user interface that conforms to Level AA of the latest version of the WCAG standard
- Ensure that the client platform supports a diversity of operating systems for which the remote meeting platform is supported. Not all access needs or assistive technologies are equally served by each of the popular operating systems. Therefore, the more choice the user has of underlying operating system, the more likely it is that accessibility and compatibility needs can be satisfied.
- Ensure that multiple meeting connection methods are available. This should include the interoperability of the remote meeting platform with the public switched telephone network, and with telephony standards such as the Session Initiation Protocol (SIP). Offering telephone-based access to the meeting allows users greater opportunities to participate using hardware and software that satisfy their access needs and with which they are familiar.
- Ensure that accessible authoring tools are recommended in preparing content (documents, presentations, etc.) for dissemination in remote meetings, taking into account the requirements of [Authoring Tool Accessibility Guidelines \(ATAG\) 2.0](#) [atag20].
- Give preference to authoring tools that comply with ATAG 2.0 so that users with disabilities can interact with them and produce accessible content.
- Evaluate other accessibility-related features of meeting platforms in light of users' access needs, as described here and in [Real Time Communication Accessibility User Requirements](#) [raur].

More generally, selecting an appropriate platform can be accomplished by reviewing the extent to which each of the available options supports the applicable standards identified in this document. The commitment of the chosen platform's developers to maintaining and enhancing accessibility-related aspects of the software is an important consideration in making a suitable choice.

The developers of remote meeting products may publish, or provide on request, an Accessibility Conformance Report based on the [Voluntary Product Accessibility Template \(VPAT\)](#) [vpat]. This report assesses the software with respect to public-sector procurement standards established in the European Union ([EN 301 549](#) [en-301-549]) and in the United States ([36 CFR Part 1194](#) [36-cfr-1194]), which in turn incorporate the *Web Content Accessibility Guidelines*, together with other accessibility requirements. Such information, if verified as accurate, provides an important basis for assessing the extent to which a remote meeting platform is likely to meet the accessibility-related needs of its users. Nevertheless, as noted elsewhere in this document, current technical accessibility standards do not fully address user needs associated with remote meeting applications. Therefore, additional evaluations are desirable to identify relevant features provided by remote meeting platforms that extend beyond what is required for conformance to technical accessibility standards, and which may not be documented in an Accessibility Conformance Report.

## § 3.2 Creating accessible remote meeting software platforms

Software developers who create and maintain remote meeting software should ensure that accessibility features and support for accessible user interface elements are included in their products. [W3C](#) provides a number of accessibility resources that can assist along with other guidance in this section.

## § 3.3 [W3C](#) guidance relevant to platform development and selection

The [W3C](#) Web Accessibility Initiative contains three guidelines and two Notes that provide assistance to the creation of accessible remote meeting platforms. Such guidance can also serve as a basis for criteria with which to evaluate the accessibility of remote meeting platforms, thus facilitating platform selection as well as development. These [W3C](#) resources include standards relating to web content, user agents and authoring tools along with non-normative notes relating to real-time communication and XR accessibility

### § 3.3.1 Relevance of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines

Guidance in the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.1](#) [wcag21] standard applies to user interface elements in remote meeting software.

**Live audio and video communications that take place among meeting participants are also subject to the Web content Accessibility Guidelines.** These are the real-time communication components of the meeting. The following WCAG 2.1 success criteria provide support for accessibility of live audio and video:

- Success Criterion 1.2.4: Captions (Live). This is applicable to real-time communication by meeting participants. The quality of captions is essential to effective communication. It should be noted that, at the time of writing, the use of automatic speech recognition (ASR) technology to generate captions typically does not yield sufficiently high quality without manual intervention to correct errors. Moreover, such correction is difficult to perform effectively in real time. In addition, live captioning can help people with cognitive disabilities by providing a transcript that can be reviewed as needed. Participants should be asked prior to the meeting if manual captioning is required.

- Success criterion 1.2.9: Audio-only (Live). This success criterion specifies that a text transcript of live, audio-only content be provided. In a meeting. This could be achieved by transcribing the dialogue in real time. As with captions of videoconferences, automatic speech recognition will not yield sufficiently high quality captions for most settings.
- For user interfaces presented live in a meeting via screen sharing: success criteria 1.4.1 (Use of color), 1.4.3 (text contrast), 1.4.6 (contrast - enhanced), 2.3.1 (three flashes or below threshold), 2.3.2 (three flashes) are applicable.

#### NOTE

Sign language interpretation greatly facilitates accessibility of meetings for sign language users. Sign language interpretation is a Level AAA requirement of WCAG 2.1 for prerecorded audio content only. However, sign language can be streamed into a videoconference window during a live videoconferencing session; this may need clarification in future versions of the Guidelines.

### § 3.3.2 Relevance of the User Agent Accessibility Guidelines

The following success criteria are relevant to the design and implementation of meeting platforms.

- 1.1.4 Facilitate Clear Display of Alternative Content for Time-based Media:

For recognized on-screen alternative content for time-based media (e.g. captions, sign language video), the following are all true: (Level A)

Don't obscure controls: Displaying time-based media alternatives doesn't obscure recognized controls for the primary time-based media.

Don't obscure primary media: The user can specify that displaying time-based media alternatives doesn't obscure the primary time-based media.

Note: Depending on the screen area available, the display of the primary time-based media (slides, documents, etc.) may need to be reduced in size to meet this requirement.

- 1.1.5 Provide Configurable Alternative Content Defaults:

The user can specify which type(s) of alternative content to render by default for each type of non-text content, including time based media. (Level AA)

- 1.1.6 Use Configurable Text for Time-based Media Captions:

For recognized on-screen alternative content for time-based media (e.g. captions, sign language video), the user can configure recognized text within time-based media alternatives (e.g. captions) in conformance with 1.4.1. (Level AA)

- 1.1.7 Allow Resize and Reposition of Time-based Media Alternatives:

The user can configure recognized alternative content for time-based media (e.g. captions, sign language video) as follows: (Level AAA)

Resize: The user can resize alternative content for time-based media to at least 50% of the size of the top-level viewports.

Reposition: The user can reposition alternative content for time-based media to two or more of the following: above, below, to the right, to the left, and overlapping the primary time-based media.

Note 1: Depending on the screen area available, the display of the primary time-based media can need to be reduced in size or hidden to meet this requirement.

Note 2: Implementation can involve displaying alternative content for time-based media in a separate viewport, but this is not required.

Reference for 1.1.7

- [User Agent Accessibility Guidelines \(UAAG\) 2.0](#) [uaag20]: this standard applies to remote meeting software that incorporates web browsers or other agents for its presentation mechanism

### § 3.3.3 Relevance of the Authoring Tool Accessibility Guidelines

The [Authoring Tool Accessibility Guidelines \(ATAG\) 2.0](#) [atag20] offers normative guidance concerning the development of authoring tools that support the creation of content. This is relevant in the context of extended remote meeting platforms such as conference hubs and LMS platforms where remote functionality is an embedded function. People with disabilities will therefore need to be able to use the frontend and backend processes of these platforms (ATAG 2.0 Part A).

### § 3.3.4 Relevance of the Real-Time Communication Accessibility User Requirements

Important considerations relating to the real-time communication development aspects of remote meeting platforms are addressed in greater detail in [RTC Accessibility User Requirements](#) [raur] (W3C Working Group Note). Notably, meeting platforms should include

- Real-time Text (RTT) support, in which characters are sent to the other party to the communication almost as soon as they are entered, instead of waiting for an entire message to be composed before it is transmitted. This allows for a more immediate conversational exchange (e.g., participants can interrupt each other), and often proves to be a more effective communication method for people who are deaf or hard of hearing than an "instant message" style of textual communication.
- Interoperability with relay services (allowing them to be brought into a conversation, as needed, to support communication, including provision of sign language interpretation).
- Support for enabling the user to switch seamlessly between modes of interaction (voice, video, real-time text, sign language interpreting).
- Support for an "instant message" style of communication in which the entire message is transmitted as a unit, rather than character-by-character. (This may be preferred, for example, by screen reader users.)
- Minimum audio and video quality requirements. Such requirements, addressing issues of video frame rates, audio clarity, and synchronization of audio and video are identified in [RTC Accessibility User Requirements](#) [raur], with reference to applicable standards.

### § 3.3.5 Relevance of the XR Accessibility User Requirements (XAUR)

Important considerations relating to the development of remote meeting platforms that make use of immersive environments are addressed in greater detail in the [XR Accessibility User Requirements \[xaur\]](#).

An example of where this guidance may be helpful is if a meeting were to take place entirely in virtual reality. XAUR can assist developers creating remote meeting platforms for this purpose to ensure people with disabilities can effectively participate.

### § 3.4 Additional guidance for creating remote meeting platforms

In addition to existing [WCAG WAI](#) guidance, meeting platform developers should

- Provide the ability to record a specific user view throughout the meeting such as a sign language interpreter.
- Provide the ability to record a transcript of the captions that were displayed during the meeting.
- Enable recordings of meetings to be edited to improve the textual accuracy and synchronization of captions. See *Synchronization Accessibility User Requirements [saur]* for further discussion of caption synchronization.
- Allow customized window views. For example, sign language participants could be pinned on screen and in particular places, or a consistent view across all participants could be established. This would allow, for example, to reference 'a person on the left' which is the same for all participants which provides a more consistent experience for people with cognitive disabilities.
- Allow the size of windows to be adjustable to assist participants with low vision.
- Allow the display of captions and subtitles to be customizable. This would include allowing the text to be enlarged, colors changed, a high contrast mode and moving the on-screen location based on user preferences .
- Ensure that, if human-authored captions are not provided, any meeting participant can at any time enable the generation of captions by automatic speech recognition, without requiring this capability to be enabled or authorized by the meeting's organizers. In some cases, caption generation may be a function of the individual participant's user agent or operating system, rather than the meeting platform.
- Ensure that status messages of video-conference controls, including user notification upon activation of camera-on status, is provided to assistive technologies so that someone who cannot

see a visual activation sensor is not broadcasting video unawares.

- Provide a prioritization mechanism for low bandwidth scenarios, e.g. sign language participants can prioritize video over audio.
- Provide support for links to receive focus upon request. This could be implemented as a separate Links box or from within the chat window.
- Provide the ability to set a unified screen resolution default for screen sharing within a meeting. This would assist people with low vision by keeping screen real estate and shared elements from changing size and shape between participants.
- Provide support for the user to toggle between the standard remote meeting interface and a simplified user interface. This would be particularly useful for people with cognitive disabilities.
- Enable users to test the quality of their audio and video input prior to participating in a meeting.

## § 4. Creating accessible content for remote meetings

In order for remote meetings to be accessible, the content used within a meeting, such as presentation slides and reference documents, also need to be made accessible. Limitations of the remote meeting software may make it necessary to distribute these documents separately. The following sections provide [W3C](#) guidance on content preparation and other practical guidance.

### § 4.1 [W3C](#) guidance relevant for accessible remote meetings

#### § 4.1.1 Relevance of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines

**Any prepared content (e.g., documents, presentation slides, prerecorded multimedia) that is shared with or shown to meeting participants is subject to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).** Policies typically specify that documents, presentations and related materials should conform to WCAG 2.1 Level AA.

## NOTE

By ensuring that content intended to be presented during a meeting conforms to WCAG, the files can be made available directly to people with disabilities who use assistive technologies such as screen readers. It should be noted that “screen sharing” techniques, which transfer rasterized images of documents, do not support accessibility by screen reader users. Therefore, content intended for use or presentation at a meeting should be offered to meeting participants in its original file format or via a delivery mechanism that preserves its document structure and relationships in a way that is compatible with assistive technologies.

### § 4.1.2 Relevance of the Authoring Tool Accessibility Guidelines (ATAG)

[Authoring Tool Accessibility Guidelines \(ATAG\) 2.0](#) [atag20] offers normative guidance concerning the development of authoring tools that support the creation of content that meets WCAG accessibility requirements. ATAG 2.0 also specifies requirements for accessibility of the user interface of an authoring tool.

Although a meeting platform is not, in itself, an authoring tool, authoring tools are used to prepare materials such as presentations and documents for dissemination in remote meetings. These tools include document editing and file format conversion software. In addition, a meeting platform may be integrated with an authoring tool to enable the real-time, collaborative writing or editing of documents or other content during a meeting.

In summary, ATAG 2.0 is applicable as follows.

- Authoring tools that partly or fully conform to ATAG 2.0 at any level of conformance are the preferred environment in which to create documents, presentations, multimedia and other materials disseminated to participants in remote meetings.
- Authoring tools included in or associated with platforms used for remote meetings, such as real-time document editing environments that allow content to be created and edited collaboratively during a meeting, should conform to ATAG 2.0.

## NOTE

*Authoring Tool Accessibility Guidelines 2.0* does not address the full range of accessibility issues associated with collaborative, real-time editing systems. Until appropriate guidance is developed, implementers of such tools should refer to the research literature on the accessibility of collaborative editors.

## § 4.2 Additional guidance for preparing remote meeting content

- Use clear language and limit the text on each slide when creating presentations
- Use consistent design in presentations to reduce the cognitive load on each slide
- Start presentation slides with a summary/overview and end with a review of the most important points

## § 5. Holding accessible remote meetings

The successful delivery of a remote meeting will require an awareness from the meeting host and participants as to what accessibility features are available and how to ensure they are available to all participants. Guidance for hosts and participants is provided as best practice.

In addition, the following Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) resources should be consulted as complements to this document.

- [Making Audio and Video Media Accessible \[media-av\]](#).
- [How to Make your Presentations and Meetings Accessible to All \[accessible-presentations\]](#).

### § 5.1 Hosting accessible remote meetings

Hosts in remote meetings should

- Verify that the meeting platform has been selected appropriately for accessibility, as described in [3.1 Selecting an accessible remote meeting platform](#).
- Ensure that calendar invites with all relevant links and documents for the remote meeting are sent with enough time for participants to review.
- Verify that audio and video tests are integrated into the platform.
- Ensure that participants are informed as to what the core features are, e.g. registration, exhibitions, presentations, etc.
- Ensure that help options are clearly identified.

- Prepare documents, presentations, multimedia and other materials so as to conform to [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.1 \[wcag21\]](#), preferably at Level AA or beyond. For an overview, see [[media-av](#)] and [[accessible-presentations](#)].
- Ensure that the files containing such documents, presentations, multimedia, etc., are available directly to meeting participants, preferably in advance of the meeting. Ensure that screen sharing is not the only means of obtaining these materials. See [4.1.1 Relevance of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#).
- If breakout rooms are used, ensure that all participants understand how to use them and logistics of entering and leaving them.
- Ensure captions are provided. If a professional captioning service is not available, enable automated captions. If automated captions are not available in the remote meeting software, consider enabling automated captions in presentation software then share the screen.
- Ensure a sign language interpreter is present where applicable.
- If appropriate tools are available, edit recordings of meetings to improve the textual accuracy and synchronization of captions. See section [3.4 Additional guidance for creating remote meeting platforms](#) for the corresponding platform feature suggestion.
- Provide alternatives to any aspects of the remote meeting platform that are not accessible to meeting participants. For example, if a tool used to coordinate turn taking in a meeting (e.g., a "hand raising" control) is not accessible to keyboard-only users or to users of assistive technologies, offer alternative means of managing turn taking.
- Ensure that participants have an adequate opportunity to become familiar in advance with any collaboration software (e.g., editing tools) to be used during the meeting.
- Plan for the possibility that some participants may need more time than others to complete tasks, such as writing or editing documents or using collaboration tools, that are to be carried out at the meeting.
- Consider performing collaborative tasks such as creating or updating documents, outside of the meeting itself, or accepting separate contributions from meeting participants and combining them before or after the meeting. Alternatively, a survey form asking questions of meeting participants could be used, with results made available immediately.
- Create accessible meeting notes that can be made available to participants before or after the meeting.
- Be familiar with the accessibility features of the meeting software platform. See [A. Resources](#) below for a partial list of links to accessibility information offered by well known meeting platform providers. For example, understand how to enable live captions. and how to verify that core functionality is keyboard accessible

- Encourage all participants to test their audio and video in advance of any meeting.
- **Remind all participants that they should, if possible, ensure that their faces, including their mouths, are visible and well-lit in the videoconferencing window.**
- Request that any participants using virtual backgrounds (photo or video) test the quality of their projection to ensure that there is no flicker of the participant's image.
- If the sound degrades during a videoconference, request that participants turn off their video to see if that improves the audio quality.
- If streaming captions or streaming sign language interpreting will be used during a videoconference, make sure to select a videoconferencing platform in which participants can anchor and freely re-size any window in which these communication accommodations will be displayed, independently from the windows showing any content (for instance, slides, whiteboard, etc.), or any other speaker.
- Provide participants with a variety of meeting connection methods (e.g. computer, app, telephone) to maximise accessibility and choice for participants with disabilities. This may also lead to additional in-meeting accessibility considerations (e.g. the need to live caption telephone participants).

A more detailed elaboration of users' accessibility needs in these scenarios may be found in the [RTC Accessibility User Requirements \[raur\]](#), the main points of which are summarized in section [3.3.4 Relevance of the Real-Time Communication Accessibility User Requirements](#).

## § 5.2 Participating in accessible remote meetings

Participants in remote meetings should

- Ensure that the video and audio features of the remote meeting connection are tested ahead of the meeting.
- Ensure that any documents, presentations, multimedia and other materials to be used in the meeting conform to [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.1 \[wcag21\]](#), preferably at Level AA or beyond.
- Ensure that the host has an accessible copy of any resources intended for use prior to the meeting commencing so that the resources can be provided to participants with disabilities.
- If a remote meeting features sign language interpretation, participants should turn off their videos so that the interpreter's view is prioritized.

## § 6. Holding accessible hybrid meetings

Hosts for hybrid meetings need to ensure that all participants can access all aspects of a meeting, regardless of whether they are physically present or joining remotely. Issues may include audio, video or content being only available to people attending in person or exclusively for people joining in remotely. The following guidance can help you ensure that your meeting is accessible to all.

### NOTE

Accessible hybrid meetings have aspects in common with accessible in-person presentations. See [[accessible-presentations](#)] for an overview of the latter.

- Ensure that the selected online platform conforms to accessibility requirements, as noted in the previously discussed procurement guidance.
- Ensure that all content is prepared to be accessible as discussed in the Creating accessible content for remote meetings section.
- Ensure that online participants and in-person participants can see and hear each other. This should include a clear view of the person speaking.
- Ensure that any words spoken by a person without a microphone are repeated by a person with a microphone.
- Ensure that captions and subtitles can be viewed simultaneously by online participants and in-person participants. for example, live captions could be on a display in the room while also being available on the remote meeting platform.
- Ensure that online waiting rooms are disabled so online participants that lose connection can easily rejoin without disturbing the hybrid meeting.
- Ensure that the timing of discussions and breaks are effectively conveyed to both in-person participants and online participants.

## § A. Resources

- [Zoom Accessibility](#)
- [Blackboard collaborate: \(integrated into Blackboard Ultra\)](#)
- [WebEx App Accessibility](#)
- [Accessibility support for Microsoft Teams](#)

- [Hangouts Meet accessibility](#)
- [ITU Guidelines for accessible meetings \(PDF, Word\)](#)
- [Create Accessible Meetings from Section508.gov](#)

## § B. References

### § B.1 Informative references

#### [36-cfr-1194]

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 Legal Information Institute. URL: [https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/36/appendix-C\\_to\\_part\\_1194](https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/36/appendix-C_to_part_1194)

#### [accessible-presentations]

*How to Make Your Presentations and Meetings Accessible to All.* W3C Web accessibility Initiative (WAI). February 2021. URL: <https://www.w3.org/WAI/teach-advocate/accessible-presentations/>

#### [atag20]

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#### [en-301-549]

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*Synchronization Accessibility User Requirements.* Steve Noble; Jason White; Scott Hollier; Janina Sajka; Joshue O'Connor. W3C. 5 July 2022. W3C Working Group Note. URL:

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<https://www.w3.org/TR/UAAG20/>

**[vpat]**

*VPAT*. Information Technology Industry Council. URL:

<https://www.itic.org/policy/accessibility/vpat>

**[wcag21]**

*Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1*. Andrew Kirkpatrick; Joshue O'Connor; Alastair Campbell; Michael Cooper. W3C. 5 June 2018. W3C Recommendation. URL:

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**USER-01**

State CIO Adopted: Dec. 10, 2024

TSB Approved: Dec. 10, 2024

Sunset Review: Dec. 10, 2027

**Replaces:**  
Policy 188  
March 10, 2010



Washington Technology Solutions

## **DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY POLICY**

**See Also:**

RCW [43.105.054](#) WaTech Governance

RCW [43.105.052](#) Powers and duties of agency—Application to higher education, legislature, and judiciary.

RCW [43.105.020](#) (22) "State agency"

**1. All covered technology must be accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities, either directly or by supporting the use of assistive technology. The [USER-01-01-S Digital Accessibility Standard](#) outlines the minimum levels for compliance.**

a. This includes all technology whether:

- i. Acquired.
- ii. Procured.
- iii. Developed.
- iv. Substantially modified.
- v. Substantially enhanced.
- vi. Technology available at no cost.

**2. Regardless of exceptions provided in this policy, agencies must provide individuals with disabilities with [effective communication](#), [reasonable modifications](#), and an equal opportunity to participate in or benefit from their services, programs, and activities.**

**3. The following exceptions apply to public facing content:**

a. Web content that meets all four of the following points:

- i. The content was created before the date the state or local government must comply with this rule, or reproduces paper documents or the contents of other physical media (audiotapes, film negatives, and CD-ROMs for example) that were created before the government must comply with this rule; and
- ii. The content is kept only for reference, research, or recordkeeping; and

- iii. The content is kept in a special area for archived content, and
    - iv. The content has not been changed since it was archived.
  - b. Preexisting conventional electronic documents that meet all of the following points:
    - i. The documents are word processing, presentation, PDF, or spreadsheet files; and
    - ii. They were available on the stated or local government's website or mobile app before the date the state or local government must comply with this rule; and
    - iii. Documents that are not currently being used to apply for, access, or participate in a state or local government's services, programs, or activities.
  - c. Content posted by a third party when outside of contractual, licensing, or other arrangements with a public entity. Tools and platforms that allow third parties to post content are not part of this exception.
  - d. Individualized documents meet all three of the following conditions:
    - i. The documents are word processing, presentation, PDF, or spreadsheet files; and
    - ii. The documents are about a specific person, property, or account; and
    - iii. The documents are password-protected or otherwise individually secured.
  - e. Preexisting social media posts.
  - f. Where strict adherence would result in a fundamental alteration in the nature of a service, program, or activity of the public entity or in undue financial and administrative burdens.
- 4. Where a covered technology is not able to be brought into compliance, the system or content owner is responsible for providing individuals with disabilities equivalent access.**
- 5. Effective July 1, 2029, in addition to the requirements set forth in this policy for covered technology, all content and tools that employees or users need to perform essential job duties, access information, or participate in programs must**

be accessible or content owner is responsible for providing individuals with disabilities equivalent access.

6. Technology that agencies use at an enterprise level must be held responsible at the service owner level.
7. This policy does not release agencies of their responsibility to provide language access, physical access to buildings, accessible communications to their staff and the public with limited or no internet access, where digital communications may not meet the needs. Agencies must also follow the relevant state policies for language access and disability access.
8. WaTech will sponsor annual digital accessibility awareness training for state agency consumption. WaTech will update this training to keep up with changes in the industry as needed.
9. Agencies must develop an agency policy to support and ensure compliance with this policy and [USER-01-01-S Digital Accessibility Standard](#).
  - a. Agencies must have a digital accessibility policy that describes how the agency will execute the state policy and defines accessibility roles and responsibilities within the agency to support this, including the accessibility coordinator.
  - b. Agencies will require and document annual digital accessibility awareness training for all employees.
  - c. Agencies will require and document additional training for roles with a larger impact on IT accessibility, such as software development. Agencies will determine and document the frequency of the training.
10. Agencies must evaluate current technology accessibility to develop and implement an IT Accessibility Plan and update it at least annually.
  - a. The agency's IT Accessibility Plan identifies how the agency will ensure new covered technologies are accessible and the plan for making existing covered technologies accessible. See [Guidance on Applying WCAG 2 to Non-Web Information and Communications Technologies \(WCAG2ICT\) \(w3.org\)](#)
  - b. Agency plans must minimally contain:
    - i. A list of prioritized non-accessible covered technology recommended alternative access methods, and actions to correct the issue.

1. Agencies must consider impact to users and frequency of use when prioritizing corrective action, especially for users with disabilities and/or users of assistive technology.
  2. Agencies must consult community members with related lived experience in building IT Accessibility Plan priorities.
- ii. Agencies must identify what agency functions are needed by state staff and members of the public and evaluate non-accessible content impacts to those functions.
- c. Agencies must post a public version of their IT Accessibility Plan including recommended alternative access methods. This may be incorporated into the Americans with Disabilities Act transition plan. See [ADA Update: A Primer for State and Local Governments, Planning for Success](#)

**11. Agencies must identify an information technology accessibility coordinator to be the key contact regarding the agency's information technology accessibility plan and to support complaint resolution.**

- a. Agencies must have contact information for the agency accessibility coordinator for any individuals who may encounter access issues or need to request alternate formats.
- b. Agencies may need to meet additional requirements for federal or other partners.

**12. Agencies must develop processes and procedures to ensure new covered technology is accessible according to the [USER-01-01-S Accessibility Standard](#).**

## REFERENCES

1. [Definition of Terms Used in WaTech Policies and Reports](#).
2. [Guidance on Applying WCAG 2 to Non-Web Information and Communications Technologies \(WCAG2ICT\)](#).
3. [USER-01-01-S Digital Accessibility Standard](#).
4. [Executive Order 24-05 Improving Employment Outcomes for People with Disabilities](#).

## CONTACT INFORMATION

For questions about this policy, please email the [WaTech Policy Mailbox](#).  
For technical assistance, please request support at [support@watech.wa.gov](mailto:support@watech.wa.gov).

## DEFINITIONS

### **Covered Technology:**

All public-facing digital content and tools, including:

- Websites,
- applications,
- documents and media,
- blog posts, and
- social media content.

Certain non-public-facing content that must also comply including:

- All electronic content used for official business to communicate,
- emergency notifications,
- internal data collection structures,
- initial or final decisions adjudicating administrative claims or proceedings,
- internal or external program or policy announcements,
- notices of benefits, program eligibility, employment opportunities, or
- personnel actions, formal acknowledgements or receipts.

### **Disability**

An actual, perceived, or non-apparent physical, sensory, mental, or cognitive condition that has an adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out day-to-day life functions. Environmental barriers may hinder persons with disabilities from fully and effectively participating on an equitable basis (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion ([DEI Glossary | SPSCC](#)))

### **Equivalent Access**

Equivalent access has such a minimal impact on access that it would not affect the ability of individuals with disabilities to use the agency's web content or mobile app to do any of the following in a manner that provides *substantially equivalent timeliness, privacy, independence, and ease of use*:

- a. Access the same information as individuals without disabilities.
- b. Engage in the same interactions as individuals without disabilities.
- c. Conduct the same transactions as individuals without disabilities; and
- d. Otherwise participate in or benefit from the same services, programs, and activities as individuals without disabilities.

### **Information Technology Accessibility/Digital Accessibility**

Information technology accessibility or digital accessibility means all people can perceive, understand, navigate, and interact with electronic information and be active in the digital world. Accessibility supports social inclusion.