



Climate and Sustainability Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes Committee Retreat, October 23, 2025

Committee Members in Attendance: Chris Greacen- Chair, Kendra Smith, Adrian Kilpatrick, Vince Dauciunas, Jay Kimball, John Pierre Van Dongen, Anastasia Jespersen, Barbara Marrett, Andy Hiester, Matilda Twigg

Committee Liaisons in Attendance: Tim Clark, David Checkley, Lynn Bahrych, Faith Van De Putte, Paul Andersson

Ex-officio and County Staff: Angela Broderick

Committee Members absent: Grant Carlton

Convene meeting

The meeting was called to order by Chair Chris Greacen. Quorum was confirmed.

- **Public Comment** – no public comment was made.

Business Operations

- Round of introductions for the newest committee members.
- The Agenda for the meeting was approved. **MOTION: Barbara moved, Vince seconded and the motion passed.**
- The July 24 2025 Meeting Minutes were approved. **MOTION: Adrian moved to pass the minutes, John Pierre seconded, and the motion passed.**

Background, Current Status and Next Steps

Angela briefly reviewed the background of work leading to the development of the Climate Element for the County's Comprehensive Plan and Climate Action Plan (CAP) for implementation. She shared the current process with Council reviewing the draft Climate Element, indicating that Council has been positive about the Climate Element, and she believes it should be adopted before the end of December. She talked about the engagement efforts which fed into its development, both by the County as well as the Climate COMPASS group. She also shared that a Water Roundtable was held in August and an Energy Roundtable was to be held in December.

Looking ahead, she outlined the plan to prioritize actions, draft the CAP, and bring it for public review with a target of May, with revisions during the summer and a hope for a final draft being adopted in the fall of 2026. Angela also shared that the Puget Sound Climate Preparedness Collaborative has accepted the application to join their Small Communities Cohort, expected to kick-off by the end of the year. This program, through a NOAA grant, provides a dedicated fellow and a technical resource support with a small contractor grant. The fellow will assist with CAP development, and the contractor grant will be used to support the development of a sustainable funding mechanism pilot. Angela also touched on water resilience planning efforts she will be helping the Dept. of Environmental Stewardship with in 2026-27, and the potential to assist the Lodging Tax Advisory Committee with their master plan update.

The group asked questions and discussed the water resilience work. Key points included:

- While surrounded by water, questions remain about desalination feasibility and energy intensity. Planning must be updated for infrastructure provisions for water and renewable energy.
- There's uncertainty about groundwater infiltration rates and reliance on ancient water sources, highlighted by isotopic analysis showing water up to 1,000 years old. Surface water and stormwater management are also critical for agriculture, wildlife, and recharge.

- The County is pursuing an Ecology grant (\$120K–\$180K) for water planning and the Clean Water Utility funds support related projects.
- The Health Department oversees septic systems and drinking water, while the Clean Water Advisory Committee (CWAC) advises the water utility, including stormwater and groundwater.
- Surface water faces risks from evaporation and harmful algal blooms, requiring strategies like shading and nutrient management.
- Farmers favor ponds for irrigation, but designs must balance fish passage and ecological impacts. Conservation District initiatives include irrigation efficiency, watershed health, and voluntary well monitoring.
- Instrumentation and monitoring wells can inform consumers and encourage conservation.

Framing our approach

Kendra outlined the current state of the County’s biennial budget and the challenges that poses to continued Climate and Sustainability work. The discussion centered around big-picture thinking about climate adaptation and mitigation in San Juan County in light of funding challenges. Key points included:

- San Juan County is facing severe budget shortfalls and shrinking state/federal support. Environmental Stewardship currently relies on a relatively small amount of county current funds (\$70K for climate program; about half of the total program cost) and primarily is funded by grants, but county current funding will likely end by 2027. Liability insurance and overhead costs are rising sharply.
- Staff are aggressively pursuing grants and exploring tourism-related revenue models. The Clean Water and Solid Waste Utilities provide some opportunity for work with a climate nexus, but reserves are limited. Administrative overhead and approval cycles can consume ~40% of effort/value, making grants unreliable and inefficient for core operations.
- State climate goals and funding mechanisms (e.g., Climate Commitment Act) are misaligned with local needs; most funds remain unspent or diverted. Local property tax limits restrict revenue growth despite rising property values.
- Ideas include creating new funding streams (utility-based fees, partnerships, nonprofit support), prioritizing core climate actions (energy, water, sea-level rise), and leveraging community generosity. There was an emphasis on collaboration with state legislators and Puget Sound Partnership to secure sustainable funding, including the possibility of CCA funding more directly supporting local jurisdictions.

The committee discussed prioritization considerations and priorities, with members highlighting the following:

- The county can uniquely streamline zoning and permitting (UDC) to enable renewables, wood product facilities, and resilience infrastructure. The committee can draft language and research to reduce staff burden and accelerate code changes in the upcoming cycle.
- For transportation, a possible reframing could be to focus on reducing fossil miles (EV adoption, electrified ferries, heating/cooling electrification) rather than Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT).
- Wildfire emissions can rival major local GHG sources, prevention and fuels reduction matter. Recently, non-burning solutions (chipping/hauling) were cost-prohibitive for SJC burn piles, leading to burning as a last resort during budget constraints. Suggestion to reconceptualize an island-scale forest products industry with biochar/woody biomass solutions as broader multiproduct facilities (power/heat + biochar + compost + chips + firewood + lumber), possibly island-specific. This requires regulatory flexibility, business plans, logistics, and funding; likely island-by-island implementation due to ferry limitations and transport inefficiencies.
- Leverage successes (EV charging build-out, mini-grid at Orcas Center), replicate where feasible; use pilot projects to build momentum while longer-term code and funding reforms advance.

Discussion: Framing our messaging

Angela provided a summary of engagement and lessons learned. She shared that engagement efforts had gathered direct feedback from over 1,200 residents, and that many others were also heard via the Climate COMPASS project facilitated by partners at the Madrona Institute and Friends of the San Juans. Community engagement showed consistent concern for climate impacts and support for advancing climate and sustainability initiatives. Focus groups

with overburdened populations (lower income, Latinex, youth) deepened the connection between community health and well-being and climate resilience.

The group discussed how best to frame and present messaging moving ahead, and how to focus community input for the final engagement phase of the Climate Action Plan. Points to highlight included:

- Highlighting co-benefits of resilience and mitigation actions
- Focus on building resilience and link to climate risks (wildfire, drought, sea level rise, etc.)
- Identify what is the right-sized work for the resources the County has available, and identify what outside entities can do that the County cannot
- Committee members can help poll others to find out who is doing what in terms of climate action on different islands
- For the upcoming second communitywide climate survey, rather than polling priorities, reframe to ask – what do you want to help build? Also ask what folks are doing or would like to do, and what barriers they face.
- Consider front-loading the survey with information about programs available, and showing examples. Add an open question for innovative ideas.
- Sector-specific conversations are important for homing in on strategies.

There was a brief re-cap of the work ahead, as discussed earlier in the session. Angela indicated that an annual report for this year and a workplan for next year would be drafted and shared.

Gratitude was expressed to the committee for the taking the time and effort to meet in person, and for all of their efforts and input.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 1:45pm.