

# Community planning for climate resiliency needs to start now

*Op-ed by Redmond Mayor Angela Birney and Black Diamond City Councilmember Kristiana de Leon. Submitted to the Seattle Times, Feb. 23, 2022.*

This past year alone, our communities have seen devastating floods in our rivers, rising sea levels on our coastlines and destructive wildfires across the state. It's clear: The climate crisis is now.

We must build our communities in sustainable ways that are adaptable to our new climate reality. That is why within the next two weeks the Legislature must pass [HB 1099](#), a crucial update to the Growth Management Act (GMA), the law that shapes local land-use planning. Passing HB 1099 would push counties and cities to focus on climate action in their comprehensive plans, which guide local development and infrastructure investments.

Land-use planning and the GMA are not everyday issues for most people, until they notice how, after a week of heavy rain, their streets are still filled with water because the nearby creek flooded and overwhelmed water-drainage systems. Due to climate change, once-in-a-generation natural disasters are occurring with increasing frequency and severity — and communities are experiencing more debilitating effects as a result.

Take for example November's flooding in Whatcom and Skagit counties. It was historic in its scale, and hundreds are still without homes. Recovery could [cost](#) Whatcom County an estimated \$50 million. We might not have been able to predict the flood being as damaging as it was, but we know that severe floods are becoming increasingly likely, and we do know how to create communities in ways that help protect them from the worst impacts of climate change.

HB 1099 adds a critical — but currently absent — stipulation for combating climate change, meaning that development must address pollution-causing climate change and the impacts of a changing climate. It provides the necessary foundation for our state to reach its [2050 net-zero emission](#) target and ensure our communities are resilient for what's to come.

With complementary funding in the budget, HB 1099 will provide resources to communities to create more climate-resilient development by providing technical assistance and grants and will allow existing federal hazard planning to align with climate resilience efforts. The Legislature already directed Washington's Department of Commerce to develop model language local governments can use to ease implementation. It can also help communities access funds from the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Passed in 2021, the act includes more than \$50 billion in competitive resilience funding, allowing local jurisdictions to apply for federal dollars to supplement climate resilience implementation costs.

The comprehensive planning process for some local jurisdictions already is underway and is due June 30, 2024, a process that occurs once every decade. The comprehensive plan is the steppingstone to realizing [Vision 2050](#), the Puget Sound region's promise to have a thriving economy and environment and create the highest quality of life possible for Washingtonians. If climate resilience isn't written into the GMA as an explicit consideration, we won't have an opportunity to shape comprehensive planning for another decade. We don't have this time to waste.

Passing HB 1099 will bring us closer to our climate goals, while providing jurisdictions with the tools we need to protect ourselves and the planet. We must act now to improve the Puget Sound region, and all of Washington. From our communities to yours, we urge the state Legislature to pass HB 1099.