The PUD is governed by three locally elected Commissioners. This Commission engaged in the development of a Strategic Plan in 2015. The 2015 Strategic Plan for the PUD was prepared following a series of public workshops with the District’s Commission and staff, and meetings with several key stakeholders and the general public. Following a public hearing on August 25, 2015, the Strategic Plan was adopted under Resolution No. 700 on December 8, 2015.
A MESSAGE FROM THE COMMISSION

Public Utility District No. 1 of Whatcom County (PUD) appreciates the input and support from all who participated in this planning effort as we look to the next few years to continue our work on behalf of the greater Whatcom community. This plan will not become shelf art as so many plans of this nature do. The PUD staff is directed to use the plan as intended, a living document for developing and implementing management of the District, communicating with our customers and the community, and continuing a regular “revisit” of the goals and strategies developed and stated herein.

Annually, as the District develops its operating and capital budgets we will return to and reflect on this plan to ensure our direction continues on course.

Thank you,

Commissioner Paul Kenner I Commissioner Jeff McClure I Commissioner Mike Murphy
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Photo:
Catwalks above the settling basin at Plant 2.
At its core this Strategic Plan defines **WHY** the PUD undertakes its programs, projects and initiatives and further provides the framework for creating other critical governance and management tools that define **WHAT** the PUD will do and **HOW** it will do it.
**PLAN DEVELOPMENT**

The Public Utility District No. 1 of Whatcom County (PUD) and the community it serves are facing a number of critical internal and external challenges over the near and midterm as the PUD moves forward to fulfill its mission.

**Those challenges include:**

1. The lack of unencumbered funds available to the PUD to pursue initiatives that advance the broader community’s needs and interests.
2. The continuing and growing complexity of water rights issues facing the area as well as the lack of widely accepted data concerning the quality and volume of the water resource.
3. Increasing costs of energy supply and delivery to the community’s industrial employers.
4. Increasing challenges of providing water to local purveyors, the agricultural sector and other water supply needs.
5. Development of an “adaptive management plan” to sustain the PUD water systems impacted by climate change.

This 2015-2020 Strategic Plan and the process used to develop it reflect the ideas, suggestions, and expectations of the PUD’s customers, staff and our partners in the community. It will provide the basis for the actions the PUD takes to best serve our community in the coming years.

The Strategic Plan is a valuable tool in guiding the PUD, its Commission and staff into the near and mid-term future. It is a useful mechanism for communicating the PUD’s intentions and priorities to both internal and external audiences while assuring organizational consensus and commitment to the PUD’s priorities.

As a practical matter this Strategic Plan will be used to develop and adopt the PUD’s upcoming operating and capital budgets for 2016 and beyond.

This Strategic Plan is one of several keystone documents the PUD adopts that provide the structural framework for its work. These “keystone documents” are guided by state statutes and represent best management practices that guide the PUD in operating and managing the District.
DEVELOPING THE STRATEGIC PLAN

The PUD engaged in a strategic planning process that included soliciting input from the community, stakeholders, customers, and local governments. That exploratory work took into account the PUD’s financial forecasts and commitments; local, state and federal regulatory requirements; relevant regional and state initiatives; and an assessment of its own strengths and capacity.
SWOT ANALYSIS

Exploring the PUD’s Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats…understanding today’s environment and the state of the PUD

To begin the strategic planning process the PUD underwent a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis to form the basis for understanding the environment in which it is working and to identify those characteristics of the PUD that complement its goals and/or detract from it reaching its goals. Equally important, it assessed the external conditions that unavoidably will impact the PUD in achieving those goals.

The PUD Commission and staff participated in a public workshop on February 27, 2015 attended by interested parties, customers and stakeholders to articulate its Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats as the first step in developing its Strategic Plan.
**STRENGTHS**

The PUD’s Strengths are the unique conditions and attributes that enhance the PUD’s ability to succeed at its stated mission.

- As a public utility district, the PUD undertakes its work as a not-for-profit agency serving the greater good of the community.
- The PUD supports, through its utility agreements, the local industrial employment base.
- The power source serving its customers has a growing “green” component and is provided at low cost.
- The water right (of the water source) utilized by the PUD has capacity and is a senior water right in the regulatory construct.
- Over the years the PUD has invested and maintained an effective, operating utility delivery infrastructure.
- As a public agency, the PUD is eligible for grants from a variety of sources and has used those effectively to advance its service to the community without burdening its ratepayers.
- The agency continues to value and retain competent and talented staff in all areas.
- The PUD maintains its focus on collaboration, transparency, and responsibility as it serves its utility customer base and the larger Whatcom community.

**WEAKNESSES**

The PUD’s Weaknesses are its acknowledged insufficient resources or capacity that work against achieving its stated mission.

- There are fluctuating and limited electric capacity supply concerns not under the PUD’s control.
- There is a lack of local, cost effective, and alternative power generating sources, such as wind and solar, available to the PUD.
- Water rights issues are complicated and the role of the PUD is often misunderstood.
- Telecom is a highly competitive industry, and the PUD’s past involvement has revealed that it requires in-depth technical knowledge in a quickly changing environment and, that as a public agency, the PUD is not always able to meet its operational expectations in this arena.
- While the PUD staff is well qualified, the magnitude of the workload can outpace staff capacity in some areas.
- There lacks a clearly defined and stable source of funds to support the PUD’s efforts in making progress on issues and challenges facing the Whatcom community that the PUD is best equipped to address.
- Need to create a succession plan for key staff positions.
OPPORTUNITIES

The PUD’s Opportunities are external conditions and circumstances that enhances the PUD’s ability to achieve its mission.

- Clarify the PUD’s role as a holder of senior water rights and its interest in being a facilitator and technical resource in resolving local water rights issues.

- Develop and maintain, over time, the necessary data associated with the water resource quality and quantity to better inform the ongoing resolution of access to water for all uses in the county.

- Provide, on a contract basis, technical and management services to agricultural, residential, municipal, and industrial water systems, providers and users.

- Explore innovative solutions to the water supply challenge such as a water exchange program.

- Assist and support the agricultural community in the effective approach to its irrigation and other water supply needs.

- Explore the value and effectiveness of the PUD assuming the role of “purveyor of last resort” of water systems in cooperation with Whatcom County government.

- Further define its role as a wholesale provider of water in Whatcom County.

- With the PUD acting as facilitator, further define the long-term needs of the rural county areas related to telecom, broadband, and connectivity services.

- Elevate the identity of the PUD as a seeker of solutions to long-standing resource issues.

- Participate with the community in innovative thinking to support a strong economy, protection of the environment and conservation of our natural resources.

THREATS

The PUD faces a number of external threats that could impact its ability to achieve its mission.

- Uncertainty and lack of understanding surrounding long-term water quality and quantity for the county, including impacts of climate change.

- Continuing complexity associated with resolving water rights issues given the many competing interests.

- Rapidly changing dynamics associated with telecom services to rural areas in the county, including changes in the regulatory framework, accelerated and disruptive technology development and increasing costs to serve lower-density populations.

- Unpredictable and seemingly increasing costs of available and traditional energy resulting in significant impacts to all users and especially the local industrial employment sector.

- Changes in the regulatory environment affecting water and energy.

- Increasing presence of investor-owned utility companies that operate under different rate structures.
Photo: Plant 2 high head pumps and water transmission lines.
COUNTIES SERVED BY PUBLIC UTILITY DISTRICTS

- Electricity PUDs
- Water PUDs
- Electricity and Water PUDs
- Electricity and Telecommunications PUDs
- Water and Telecommunications PUDs

Source: WPUDA
**HISTORY**

Washington’s public utility districts were created in 1930 through a statewide referendum initiated by the Washington State Grange. The Grange, largely an agricultural organization, collected more than 60,000 signatures to send Initiative No. 1 to the Legislature, allowing rural communities to form their own publicly owned utilities. The measure went to a statewide election where it passed with 54% of the vote. The new public utility district law, now captured in Revised Code of Washington (RCW) Chapter 54 went into effect in 1931.

**RCW 54** authorized the establishment of public utility districts to “conserve the water and power resources of the State of Washington for the benefit of the people thereof, and to supply public utility service, including water and electricity for all uses.” The first public utility district was created in 1934 in Mason County. Today there are 28 operating public utility districts with 23 providing electricity, 19 providing water or water and wastewater services, and 13 offering wholesale broadband telecommunications.

Collectively, public utility districts in Washington get nearly 82 percent of their energy from hydropower, a clean, renewable resource that produces almost zero greenhouse gas emissions. They serve over 2 million customers and generate over $1.5 billion in revenues. Unlike private utilities, public utility districts are run by an elected, nonpartisan board of commissioners directly accountable to the voters.

Commissioners meet at least monthly in open meetings where members of the public can observe and participate in the decision-making process. Public utility districts are also nonprofit utilities – owned by the community, not by stockholders. They are in business solely to provide a service, not to make a profit. Consequently, public utility district rates are generally lower – and service values higher – than investor-owned utilities that are focused on making a return on investment for their stockholders.
The creation of the PUD was approved by the voters in 1936 to supply water and electricity under RCW 54. On January 11, 1937, the PUD became operational.

The original desire of the citizens of Whatcom County was to take over the Puget Sound Power and Light operations in Whatcom County and replace the investor-owned utility with a publicly owned electric utility.

For a number of reasons this did not happen, primarily because of the start of World War II. By the time the war ended, no one was up to the legal fight that was likely to ensue if the process went forward.
When General Petroleum Corporation came to Whatcom County looking for a refinery site in 1952, Puget Sound Power and Light was unable to supply the energy or obtain additional energy in the market. Through an arrangement with another public utility district in Washington State, Pend Oreille County Public Utility District, the PUD was able to obtain the energy supply which permitted the building of the refinery at Cherry Point. In the process, the PUD gained an electric customer and became a functional electric utility.

The PUD went into the water business in the 1960’s when an aluminum company, now Intalco, built a facility at Cherry Point and the PUD provided process water to operate the plant. Eventually, more industrial facilities were built at Cherry Point and the PUD now supplies all industries at Cherry Point with their process water.

The PUD currently has legal authority to supply water, as well as electricity, anywhere in Whatcom County with the exception of electricity in the cities of Blaine and Sumas because they were existing municipal electric utilities. The PUD could also build and operate sewerage systems, but it would require another vote of the people of Whatcom County.
The PUD is actively involved in watershed planning and in maintaining services to its current service area in the industrial zone at Cherry Point, and the Grandview/Northgate/I-5 Industrial Park located north of Ferndale. The PUD encourages all of its customers to practice conservation of water and electric resources and to reuse water. The PUD maintains an active role in several regional water supply and water quality planning efforts and supports habitat recovery programs such as the Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association.

**Our local PUD:**

- Holds water rights to divert 53 million gallons per day from the Nooksack River. The PUD operates one water system comprising two river diversions, two treatment plants and 20 miles of pipeline providing industrial grade water to industries and irrigation customers, as well as wholesale service to other water associations.

- Operates a second water system providing potable and fire protection water for a large industrial park (Grandview/Northgate/I-5 Industrial Center). The water source for this system is groundwater.

- Treats and distributes 5 billion gallons of water a year and is the largest water processor in Whatcom County with an average current use of 14 million gallons per day. It sells more water than any other public utility district in the state by almost twice the amount.

- Currently has one retail electric service customer that annually consumes approximately 25 average megawatts of electricity, the PUD uses two average megawatts to operate its water system.

- Currently owns 15 miles of electric transmission and distribution lines and three electric substations.

- Currently has a power purchase agreement with Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) to purchase all the energy needed to serve the PUD’s current electric customers and its operations.

- Has electric transmission agreements with BPA and Puget Sound Energy in which some of the electric energy purchased from BPA is transmitted to the PUD’s electric system for the PUD’s use.
The PUD is governed by three elected Commissioners, one from each of the three districts representing all of Whatcom County. In turn, the Commission acting as a body of the whole appoints a General Manager to manage the day to day operations of the District; approves policies; and adopts an annual operating and capital budget.
Photo: Plant 2 weirs and settling basins.
THE ROLE OF THE PUD

PUD No. 1 of Whatcom County | STRATEGIC PLAN 2015
ITS MISSION

Public Utility District No. 1 of Whatcom County is a steward of water and energy resources providing locally controlled utility services and resource protection for the benefit of the residents, businesses, and agricultural community of greater Whatcom.
THE ROLE OF THE PUD
Since the 1930’s the PUD has successfully served the community, consistent with governing statutes, but has remained flexible in focusing its mission to best serve the community.

FOLLOWING ITS EARLY SWOT WORKSHOP THE COMMISSION REVISTED ITS BASIC MISSION STATEMENT IN ITS SECOND PUBLIC WORKSHOP ON APRIL 21, 2015 AND REFINED IT TO BETTER CAPTURE ITS CURRENT UNIQUE ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY. THE MISSION STATEMENT PROVIDES THE FOUNDATION UPON WHICH ALL STRATEGIC PLANNING IS PINNED.

UNIQUE ROLES

1) A Steward of Water and Energy Resources
The PUD supports the protection and efficient use of natural resources in Whatcom County. Water resource management and water supply planning help increase water use efficiency, promote water conservation, and enhance resource protection. The PUD works with local, regional, and federal governments as well as regional organizations to develop workable approaches to effective water resource and supply management practices.

In addition, the PUD is conscious of the limitation of scarce traditional energy resources as well as the escalating cost of their production and transmission, and supports the wise use of energy and the exploration of alternative sources.

2) A Provider of Core Utility Services
Since its formation, the PUD has maintained its commitments to providing water and energy to the area’s major industrial employers. Beginning in the early 1950’s, the PUD provided electrical power to an area refinery, and in the 1960’s supported the development of the aluminum smelter by serving it with water. Both continue to operate today at Cherry Point. The PUD now serves all industries at Cherry Point with water including two refineries and a smelter.

3) A Provider of Technical Resources
The PUD supports its own operations and other public utility providers in the community with technical, educational and operational resources. The PUD acts as a problem solver in assisting other public and non-profit organizations in the provision, conservation and management of the water and energy services utilized in the county. To support local efforts at managing the water resource, the PUD has kept in the forefront its ability to provide technical and management assistance to large industrial users, municipal and small water systems as well as other local providers of potable water.

ALONG WITH REFINING ITS MISSION STATEMENT DURING THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS THE PUD ExpLORED THE PRACTICAL ARTICULATION OF THE UNIQUE ROLES IT PLAYS IN WHATCOM COUNTY AND THE GOALS THAT SUPPORT THOSE ROLES.
VALUES

The PUD undertakes its work with an emphasis on values that support and guide it through often complex decision making and prioritization of the use of valuable resources that the PUD holds in trust for the community. These are captured in two complementary sets of values:

Cultural Values: Those values that define the PUD’s expectation of the agency, its Commission and staff in undertaking the PUD’s work.

✓ Honesty and Integrity Operate and manage the affairs of the PUD in an open and transparent atmosphere.

✓ Creativity Promote divergent thinking and perspectives to realize innovative and creative solutions.

✓ Courage Act strategically upon convictions in the face of skepticism.

✓ Mutual Respect Carefully considers all views, even in disagreement, from both within and outside of the organization.

✓ Unity Understand that in working together, more can be accomplished for the community than operating unilaterally.

Outcome Values: Those values that guide how the PUD assesses its success in achieving its goals and realizing its mission.

✓ Stewardship The PUD understands the fragile nature of the area’s water resource and the need to sustainably manage it to serve generations to come, and in doing so, be protective of the natural environment.

✓ Conservation Energy and water are vital resources and the PUD supports the conservation of energy and water, and the development of alternative energy solutions that are less impactful on the environment.

✓ Core Services The PUD places a priority on providing its industrial client base with core utility services in support of their contribution to the community.

✓ Human Capital The staff at the PUD is one of its most valuable assets and the agency is dedicated to attracting, retaining and supporting the right individuals.

✓ Vision The PUD manages its facilities and programs with the long view in mind, being cost effective and safe for the public, its employees and the environment.

THE PUD’S VALUES REFLECT THE BELIEFS AND IDEALS THAT THE PUD SUBSCRIBES TO AS IT DELIVERS ON ITS MISSION — IN ESSENCE, HOW IT DOES ITS WORK.
To further its unique roles, the PUD has established six foundational goals that support its roles in the community. These goals direct the course of the PUD as the PUD fulfills its mission and defines, in general terms, what it aspires to accomplish in the medium and long term. The figure below demonstrates the relationship between the PUD’s unique roles and its foundational goals.

**FOUNDATIONAL GOALS**

**GOAL 01**
Serve as a steward of the water resources throughout Whatcom County.

**GOAL 02**
Serve as a steward of the energy resources throughout Whatcom County.

**GOAL 03**
Effectively manage the core utility service of the delivery of power and water to our industrial employment client base.

**GOAL 04**
Provide technical assistance and support to the community in the supply and delivery of power and water.

**GOAL 05**
Maintain the financial capacity of the PUD to continue to provide essential services as well as accommodating the planned expansion of support to the community.

**GOAL 06**
Provide, educate, support, and maintain consistent, high-quality technical proficiency in staff knowledge, experience and performance, as well as the corresponding management infrastructure to support that performance.
Photo: Part of the PUD’s 115kV electric transmission lines and “H” frame structures.
LOOKING FORWARD (2016 - 2020)
PUD No. 1 of Whatcom County | STRATEGIC PLAN 2015
Planned strategies reflect the direction and scope of the PUD over the long term to meet the needs of its constituents, fulfill stakeholder expectations, and realize its goals. Planned strategies focus on the entire forest and not individual trees. Planned strategies were evaluated and prioritized in draft at the PUD’s third workshop on June 23, 2015.

Tactics are the planned actions that deliver the planned strategies, a set of maneuvers designed to achieve a specific end result. Tactics focus on the trees in the forest and are undertaken by the organization’s staff under the direction of its General Manager.
Planned Strategies

To realize its foundational goals, the PUD has formulated a set of planned strategies. These strategies put into action the PUD’s mission and reflect its values. The PUD’s management and technical staff will work closely with the Commission to develop tactics to support and set into action the planned strategies.

The following 2016 and beyond planned strategies were prioritized based on their perceived significant benefit to the larger community, as well on the PUD’s ability to allocate sufficient resources to continue to support their undertaking.

Planned Strategies are what we do between opportunities, and understanding this dynamic is key to the long-term success of the PUD.
Goal 1: Steward of Water Resources
Support water resource management to sustain water supply, increase water use efficiency, improve water conservation and enhance source protection.

1.1 Continue to assist other agencies, organizations, businesses and industries in the management of the water resource in the County and expand that effort to consider innovative approaches such as a water exchange program.

1.2 Continue an active role in the resolution of the water rights and associated watershed planning needs facing the county.

1.3 Develop ways to expand as a provider of bulk water to county-wide users including allocation of the resource and/or delivery infrastructure.

1.4 Initiate a specific support program targeted at the water resource needs of the local agriculture industry.

Goal 2: Steward of Energy Resources
Support energy efficiency and energy savings programs and the exploration of alternative energy sources.

2.1 Maintain the current program to promote significant conservation projects with measurable outcomes that result in energy conservation.

Goal 3: Manage Core Utility Services
Effectively manage the core water and energy services delivery to the District’s industrial customers.

3.1 Continue to develop joint strategies with other key stakeholders with interests in water rights to support the PUD’s industrial client base.

Goal 4: Provide Technical Services
4.1 Promote the PUD’s current practice of providing limited technical support to local water associations through interagency agreements.

Goal 5: Maintain Long-Term Financial Management Program to Support the Services the PUD Provides
5.1 Develop rate structures that reflect the “true” costs of preserving needed resources, including water rights and associated legal, infrastructure, planning, and management processes.

5.2 Review and update appropriate policies to support the financial management tools developed.

5.3 Develop a long-term specific strategy addressing operational needs, and debt management and an appropriate water and electrical rate structure so that services provided by the PUD are sustainable.

Goal 6: Management Support Proficiently
6.1 Continue to define and pursue the development of technically qualified staff to undertake the selected planned strategies as well as sufficient capacity to protect against erosion of the ability to serve the core activities of the PUD.

6.2 Develop a succession plan for key management and operational personnel.

6.3 Appropriately and clearly distinguish the identity of the PUD, its role in the community, and future roles in water and energy resource topics.
SPECIAL INITIATIVES FOR 2016

These strategies should be analyzed further in 2016 to measure whether they should be pursued further. In addition, the PUD will focus on exploring the following initiatives in 2016 to determine if there are realistic and viable outcomes that would be realized so as to appropriately balance the overall public benefit with the impact and cost of realizing that benefit.

✓ Through collaboration with the area’s large industrial employers, identify mechanisms for providing more cost effective power to them.

✓ Further assess the PUD’s role in acting as a “Satellite Management Agency” (SMA) at various SMA category levels as defined in Washington Administrative Code Chapters 246 – 295 and acting as “purveyor of last resort” in cooperation with Whatcom County Government.

✓ Determine demand for expanded technical support by the PUD, beyond its existing informal relationships, to other local public electrical service providers and, if desired, institute that expanded support by adopting more formal agreements.

✓ Undertake an analysis of the feasibility of creating a technical assistance “extension service,” such as a “water institute,” to, for example, serve the planning and technical needs of the providers of potable, irrigation, process and fire suppression water supply.

✓ Develop ongoing expertise in order to understand, monitor and forecast the state of the water resource in Whatcom County.

NEW OPPORTUNITIES

In its pursuit to realize its mission, the PUD recognizes the need to balance a planned and intended future against the flexibility required as conditions and opportunities change.

New and unforeseen opportunities likely will arise that are not anticipated in this plan or in the annual capital or operating budgets. The PUD strives to remain flexible in order to capitalize on these new “opportunities,” but must be deliberate in evaluating and investing in them. A series of qualitative and quantitative inquiries has been identified to allow the PUD to consider these opportunities without compromising the success of its ongoing planned strategies. As new opportunities present themselves should the PUD consider them?

Project-Specific Strategic Checklist – Should the PUD consider the Project?

✓ Is it consistent with the PUD’s mission, goals, and values?

✓ Are there joint ventures or grant partnership possibilities that would mitigate the PUD’s required investment?

✓ What, if any, planned PUD investments or planned strategies will be delayed or eliminated because of this opportunity and what are the short-term and long-term consequences of that displacement decision? Is that acceptable?

✓ Will the local community support the outcomes of the effort?

✓ Does the project significantly advance an existing governmental or community plan or policy?

✓ Is any other entity, private or public, better positioned to undertake this opportunity, and are they able to do so?

✓ What should the PUD’s role be in the initiative (i.e. support, investment, operations, partner)?
APPENDIX A | CONTRIBUTING ORGANIZATIONS

Through one-on-one meetings and attendance at public work sessions, the following stakeholders provided input to the Strategic Plan process.

**Whatcom County**
Executive Jack Louws, Jon Hutchings, Tyler Schroeder and Gary Stoyka

**City of Bellingham**
Mayor Kelli Linville, Brian Heinrich, Clare Fogelsong and Ted Carlson

**City of Ferndale**
Mayor Gary Jenson and City Administrator Greg Young

**City of Lynden**
Mayor Scott Korthuis and City Administrator Mike Martin

**ALCOA/Intalco**
Barry Hullet and Staff

**BP Cherry Point Refinery**
Bill Kidd, Pat Pollock and Jeff Chalfant

**Phillips66 Refinery**
Rich Harbison, Rick Maricle, Jeff Callender and Dan Kier

**Ag Board/Watershed Improvement Districts**
Henry Bierlink, Greg Ebe, Marty Mayberry, Ed Blok, Scott Bedlington and Brad Rader