

Common Ground Workshop Pre-Read

October 4, Chapter 9 of the City of Ellensburg's Comprehensive Plan

Thank you for your interest and/or attendance at our upcoming *Common Ground* workshop. This document serves as both an overview of the process which has led us here as well as the statements which were validated as part of the Community Conversations for the thoughts from both the “Remove Chapter 9” and “Keep Chapter 9” opinions. These will serve as a common foundation to guide our work in the October workshop.

Background

Washington State's Growth Management Act allows cities to amend their comprehensive plan on an annual basis. The Ellensburg City Council has established a process for that yearly amendment review, Ellensburg City Code (ECC) 15.250.090. ECC 15.250.090(D)(2) allows for proposed comprehensive plan amendments to be submitted to the city for consideration by March 31 of each year. By this year's submittal deadline of March 31, 2025, the City received 308 comprehensive plan amendment applications essentially requesting the removal of Chapter 9, Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI).

As the submittal of these applications became public knowledge, community members also submitted comments voicing their interest in keeping the DEI Chapter of the comprehensive plan. Per ECC 15.250.090(D)(3), Council was to review all submitted proposals to consider if they should be docketed at the second Council meeting in July. In preparation for this July docketing meeting, City staff met with leadership, Braver Angels and facilitators to discuss possible options for how to move this community passion and involvement forward into a productive conversation resulting in community-driven solutions for how to address the proposed comprehensive plan amendments.

The facilitators developed a plan to conduct two community conversations, followed by this Common Ground workshop. All 308 comprehensive plan amendment applications submitted, and additional written comments submitted, were analyzed and separated into the main arguments for keeping/modifying the chapter, and main arguments for removing it. These arguments were presented at two community conversations, and the public was invited to confirm, correct, and suggest edits to these arguments. The work from those conversations was compiled into this pre-read for the Common Ground Workshop. The intention of the workshop is to find common ground that both sides can agree is important, at which point staff will use that information to develop a recommendation to either keep, remove, or modify the comprehensive plan in some way. This recommendation will be brought back to Council for further analysis and next steps.

Thoughts on Chapter 9

The following thoughts were verified and created during the meetings which led into this workshop. They are listed in no priority but simply serve as guideposts for thoughts each side has had regarding Chapter 9. For more background on each of these perspectives, see the full downloadable texts at <https://ci.ellensburg.wa.us/1284/2025-DEI-Comprehensive-Plan-Amendments>

Remove Chapter 9

- **Government Scope & Role Concerns:** City government should focus on essential services rather than social policy initiatives. The proper role of local government is to provide core municipal services.
- **Legal Authority Concerns:** DEI policies may create legal risks for the city and exceed proper municipal authority. Compliance with federal guidelines should be prioritized.
- **Budget & Spending Concerns:** Public funds should be directed toward essential city services rather than DEI programs and commission activities.
- **General Opposition to DEI:** DEI concepts and policies should be eliminated from city government entirely.
- **Remove DEI Language**
- **Constitutional Protections Already Exist:** Existing constitutional protections and federal laws already provide adequate safeguards without additional DEI policies. DEI chapters are not required elements of comprehensive plans and other cities operate successfully without them.
- **Deadline and Process Violations:** The city failed to follow its own established procedures and deadlines in handling comprehensive plan amendment applications, raising questions about fair and consistent administration.
- **Implementation Concerns:** How DEI is being implemented in Ellensburg. Disenfranchises certain people, elevates others (e.g. Pool locker rooms, pizza klatch)

Keep Chapter 9

- **Promoting Inclusivity and Belonging:** The DEI Commission's work helps create a welcoming and accepting community where all residents feel valued.
- **Addressing Historical Inequities and Marginalization:** DEI efforts are necessary to address a history of systemic unfairness. The commission's work is seen to correct these issues and ensure everyone is treated as an equal citizen.
- **Supporting the Community Through Programs and Funding:** DEI Commission provides tangible support such as grant funding for various community groups and initiatives as specified in Chapter 9.
- **Benefitting the Entire Community:** DEI work strengthens the community. This includes attracting visitors and students who feel welcome, which can positively impact the local economy and make Ellensburg a place where people want to live.
- **The City (as a government entity) should base their decisions and practices in the principles of diversity, equity and inclusion** because they need to be responsive to all members of the community and historic discrimination/marginalization still impacts whose voices are heard.
- **Equity and inclusion should be in the Comp Plan as it,** and the DEI Commission, are based on demonstrable and stated needs of residents, which has been reinforced by listening tours and ongoing local issues (e.g. bullying in the schools based on identity). It is locally specific and attends to system and structural issues.