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SUBJECT: Ellensburg CETA Public Process Outcomes

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## Purpose

This memo describes the outcomes of a public process conducted for the City of Ellensburg (the City) by Lighthouse Energy Consulting and Rockcress Consulting as part of the development of the City's Clean Energy Implementation Plan (CEIP), as required every four years by Washington's Clean Energy Transformation Act (CETA).

CETA requires all of Washington's electric utilities to transition to 100% carbon neutral electricity in 2030 and 100% clean energy by 2045. While the City's natural gas service does not fall under the purview of CETA, it is subject to Washington's Climate Commitment Act (CCA). As usage of natural gas changes under the CCA, the City's CEIPs will identify how it can best position its electric service to meet any additional electric load with affordable clean energy.

CETA also has provisions to ensure that the transition to clean energy is equitable. CETA's equity provisions require utilities to:

- Identify highly impacted communities and vulnerable populations,
- Establish a public input process in the development of their CEIP,
- Develop indicators to forecast the distribution of costs and benefits,
- Take specific actions to reduce risks to the identified highly impacted communities and vulnerable populations

Each of these requirements is discussed below.

## Highly Impacted Communities

Under CETA, Highly Impacted Communities (HIC) are defined as communities designated by the Department of Health based on cumulative impact analyses or communities located in census tracts that are fully or partially on "Indian country" as defined in 18 U.S.C. Sec. 1151.<sup>1</sup>

The City does not have any HIC. While none are designated locally, the City still recognizes the importance of identifying and supporting populations that may face disproportionate impacts during

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<sup>1</sup> Please refer to [RCW 19.405.020\(22\)](#).

the clean energy transition. This was reflected in both the presentation content and community feedback gathered at the September 23, 2025 workshop. Outreach and program design efforts focused on ensuring participation from vulnerable groups within the broader community, such as low-income households and unaffordable housing.

## Public Process

The City implemented a multi-layered public engagement strategy for its 2025 CEIP, combining broad outreach with in-depth opportunities for feedback (**Figure 1**). The approach ensured that residents, businesses, and community organizations could meaningfully contribute to CEIP priorities.

**Figure 1. Public Input Engagement Channels**

**Promotion:** Pre-event outreach through the City's website, press release, email invites, newsletters, flyers, social media, local radio and community events.

**Sustainability & Energy Plan (SEP) Surveys & Interviews:** 312 online survey responses and 11 in-depth interviews with organizations serving vulnerable populations.

**Direct Outreach:** Targeted engagement through its SEP with the City's largest energy customers and key stakeholders.

**Public Workshop (September 23, 2025):** Featured educational presentations on CEIP requirements and draft actions, followed by live, interactive polling to capture real-time community feedback.

**Written Comments:** The City created a webpage that allowed those that would like to participate in its 2025 CEIP to provide feedback.

This multi-channel layered approach yielded both quantitative data (polling percentages) and qualitative insights (written comments and facilitator notes). Together, these inputs provided the City with a well-rounded picture of community priorities—ranging from broad consensus on affordability and weatherization to specific programmatic recommendations for the 2025 CEIP.

## Addressing Barriers to Participation

The City of Ellensburg recognized several barriers that could limit participation in the public input process:

- **Technological barriers:** Not all community members have access to smartphones, computers, or reliable internet
- **Time constraints:** Working families, particularly low-income households, may struggle to attend daytime or evening meetings
- **Language barriers:** Non-English speaking residents may face difficulties understanding technical energy policy information

- **Awareness gaps:** Many residents may not know about CETA and CEIP regulatory requirements or understand how to participate in policy processes. Some may have a limited understanding of the full range of programs offered by the City.
- **Cultural barriers:** Some populations may not feel comfortable speaking up in public forums or may not see themselves represented in utility decision-making

To overcome these barriers, the City implemented the following strategies:

#### **Technological Accessibility:**

- Offered both online and in-person engagement opportunities
- Provided paper polling options at the workshop for participants without smartphones
- Made all polling anonymous to encourage candid feedback without fear of judgment
- Ensured the workshop venue had adequate technological support for participants

#### **Broad Outreach:**

- Utilized multiple communication channels (digital, print, radio, in-person) to reach diverse audiences
- Conducted surveys in advance of the 2025 CEIP development to capture input from those unable to attend
- Held individual stakeholder interviews to gather in-depth perspectives from community organizations serving vulnerable populations

#### **Ongoing Engagement:**

- Accepted written public comments to accommodate those who preferred to provide input outside of the workshop setting
- Created opportunities for feedback both before and after the September 23 workshop

These efforts demonstrate the City's commitment to removing barriers and ensuring that all community voices—particularly those of vulnerable populations—inform the development of the CEIP.

### **Why This Approach Was Used**

This multi-faceted approach was designed to meet CETA's requirement for meaningful public participation while ensuring accessibility for diverse community members. By combining digital surveys, personal interviews, and in-person workshops, the City created multiple pathways for participation that accommodate different communication preferences, schedules, and comfort levels with technology.

The interactive polling methodology used at the September 23 workshop was specifically chosen to:

- **Gather input:** Provide all attendees with equal voice in shaping CEIP priorities
- **Enable real-time feedback:** Allow participants to see how their priorities aligned with community consensus
- **Create transparency:** Make the process visible and inclusive

- **Generate quantifiable data:** Produce measurable results that could be incorporated directly into CEIP planning

This approach ensures that the CEIP reflects authentic community priorities rather than assumptions about what vulnerable populations need.

### Sustainability & Energy Plan (SEP) Surveys & Interviews

As part of the City's Sustainability & Energy Plan (SEP), the City conducted in-depth interviews with local community organizations to understand present and future energy challenges. The following organizations participated in this process:

- Allied People Offering Year-Round Outreach (APOYO)
- Ellensburg DEI Commission
- Friends in Service to Humanity (FISH)
- HopeSource
- Kittitas County Habitat for Humanity
- Kittitas County Veterans Coalition
- Kittitas Early Learning Coalition
- WorkSource Kittitas County

These organizations, each working closely with diverse segments of the community, offered critical perspectives on who is most vulnerable, what risks they face, and what actions could help mitigate those risks during the clean energy transition. Their input served as the foundation for shaping the City's equity approach within the CEIP. Through the interviews, stakeholders highlighted a range of groups that may experience disproportionate impacts, including those identified in **Figure 2**.

**Figure 2. SEP Community Organization Interviews – Populations Identified as Most Vulnerable**

Seniors	Seniors on a fixed income	Veterans	Low-income families	Single-parent households
Renters	People with disabilities	People of color (particularly Latinos)	People living in unstable housing	People suffering poor air quality (particularly from wildfires)
Low-income families living in inefficient homes	People that speak a language other than English	People in need of affordable housing	Young families	Families where both parents work

Organizations identified several risks that could intensify inequities in the community, including those identified in **Figure 3**.

**Figure 3. SEP Community Organization Interviews – Identified Risks**

Language barriers	Childcare access	Education gaps	Unemployment & underemployment	Veteran-specific issues (financial assistance)
Transportation access	Supportive services (mental health)	Poor indoor air quality	High energy bills	Inefficient HVAC systems
Limited awareness of programs	High cost of living	Affordable housing	Digital Divide (particularly for seniors)	

Participants also suggested potential strategies to reduce risks and improve equitable outcomes, including those identified in **Figure 4**.

**Figure 4. SEP Community Organization Interviews – Potential Actions to Support the Community**

Outreach & education on energy efficiency programs	Multilingual communication programs	Enhanced low-income rate programs	Emergency assistance for power shutoffs	Targeted weatherization programs
On bill financing for energy efficiency	Energy efficiency property tax	Demand response with education	Solar and renewable energy	Electric buses for public transit
Bill discounts	Simplified program design	Data-driven equity tracking	Community partnerships	

The results of these interviews were summarized and used to frame live polling questions at the September 23, 2025 CEIP workshop. This allowed community members to provide direct feedback on the populations identified as vulnerable, the risks they face, and the potential actions that could best support them. In this way, the City combined organizational expertise with community input to create a more inclusive and representative foundation for its CEIP.

## Public Input Workshop

The September 23rd workshop served as the cornerstone of the process. While the event was primarily attended by local residents, those invited to participate included residential customers, organizational representatives, businesses, and stakeholders working directly with vulnerable populations. Interactive polling (7–11 responses per question) was offered via smartphone and paper formats, allowing for candid, accessible feedback on vulnerable populations, risks, actions, and performance indicators.

## Results

The City utilized the findings from the SEP interviews with community organizations as a starting point for polling questions. At the September 23, 2025 CEIP workshop, participants engaged in four structured polling exercises to identify vulnerable populations, risks, actions, and indicators. Response rates ranged from 7 to 11 participants per question, with multiple selections allowed. Polling results can be found in **Appendix A**.

### Vulnerable Populations

CETA requires utilities to identify vulnerable populations based on adverse socioeconomic and sensitivity factors. These populations must be defined through a public input process and guide the development of the CEIP.

The community identified vulnerability primarily at the intersection of affordability, and energy efficiency:

- Unaffordable housing (>30% of income): 86% – strongest consensus across all questions
- Low-income families: 71%
- Low-income families in inefficient homes: 71%

Other groups noted included seniors on fixed incomes, people with disabilities, people of color (particularly Latinos), and those in unstable housing (43% each).

#### *Vulnerable Population Definition for the 2025 CEIP*

**Finding:** Community definitions of vulnerability have shifted from broad demographic categories toward direct energy and housing-related burdens. Based on community input, the City defines vulnerable populations for the 2025 CEIP as described in **Figure 5**.

**Figure 5. 2025 CEIP Vulnerable Populations**

Unaffordable Housing	Low-income Families	Low-income Living In-efficient Homes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Households spending more than 30% of income on housing costs</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Residents experiencing high energy burdens relative to household income</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Low-income families, particularly those living in energy-inefficient homes</li></ul>

This definition directly informs how CEIP actions—including rebates, upgrades, weatherization programs, and fuel-switching incentives—will be targeted to ensure the greatest benefit reaches those most vulnerable to high energy costs and the impacts of the clean energy transition.

#### *Evolution from 2022 CEIP*

The 2022 CEIP vulnerable population definition emphasized broad socioeconomic and environmental health factors, including health outcomes, educational attainment, proximity to environmental hazards, and demographic characteristics. While these factors remain relevant, the 2025 public engagement process revealed a more nuanced, experience-based understanding of vulnerable populations within the community.

The 2025 polling results represent a fundamental shift in how vulnerability is defined for CEIP purposes:

- **From:** General health and demographic indicators
- **To:** Practical, energy-related definitions tied directly to housing affordability and efficiency

This evolution reflects community voices prioritizing the lived experience of energy burden—the daily reality of choosing between paying utility bills and meeting other basic needs. By emphasizing housing efficiency alongside income, the community definition recognizes that vulnerability is not determined by income alone, but by the combination of limited resources and energy-inefficient housing stock.

#### **Community Risks**

CETA requires utilities to identify how they will reduce risks to highly impacted communities and vulnerable populations. In order to understand how best to reduce these risks, the City first sought to identify the risks that were faced by these groups.

Respondents identified the most pressing risks as:

- High cost of living: 82%
- Childcare access: 64%
- High energy bills & inefficient HVAC systems: 45% each

Other risks included education gaps, affordable housing shortages, mental health needs, and language barriers.

#### *Identifying Community Risks for the 2025 CEIP*

**Finding:** Energy affordability is inseparable from the broader affordability crisis facing families, where housing, childcare, and living costs compound vulnerability. Community engagement through surveys and stakeholder interviews directly shaped the identification of risks and corresponding actions in this CEIP. Workshop polling confirmed that vulnerable populations face multiple, interconnected risks during the clean energy transition as discussed below.

#### **Economic Risks:**

- High cost of living (82% of participants identified this as a top risk)
- High cost or limited access to child care (64%), constraining household financial stability and economic mobility

- High energy bills disproportionately affecting low-income households (45%)
- Limited financial capacity for upfront costs of efficiency upgrades

#### **Housing & Infrastructure Risks:**

- Inefficient HVAC systems (45%) that drive high energy consumption and costs
- Ability to find affordable housing (36%) for both renters and homeowners
- Renters' limited ability to access upgrades and rebates

#### **Access & Equity Risks:**

- Limited awareness of available programs (27%)
- Language barriers (27%) limiting access to program information
- Digital divide (27%), particularly affecting seniors
- Potential inequities in clean energy technology adoption if programs are not designed with accessibility in mind

#### **Health & Safety Risks:**

- Risks from outages or extreme weather events, particularly for seniors and medically vulnerable populations
- Indoor air quality issues from wood heating and gas appliances
- Energy insecurity leading to health impacts from inadequate heating or cooling

#### **Actions to Reduce Risks**

Based on the risks identified and discussed above, the City then sought input on how it can reduce risks. Participants expressed overwhelming support for two priorities:

- Outreach & education on energy efficiency: 91%
- Targeted weatherization programs: 91%

Other actions with strong support included enhanced low-income rate programs (64%), solar and renewable energy (64%), and expanded transit options such as electric buses (55%).

#### *2025 CEIP Actions*

**Finding:** There is a clear support to expand weatherization and education efforts, reinforcing the City's current CEIP priorities. The following actions, informed directly by community priorities identified through polling and discussion, form the core risk-reduction strategy for the 2025 CEIP:

- **Energy Efficiency Programs (91% community support):** By continuing to offer energy efficiency programs for residential, commercial, and industrial customers, while prioritizing weatherization upgrades for low-income households and inefficient homes.
- **Enhanced Outreach & Education (91% community support):** By expanding energy education efforts to build long-term energy literacy across the community, with a focus on reaching vulnerable populations to improve understanding of energy efficiency. This approach provides the City with the flexibility to adapt engagement strategies based on available resources and emerging community needs.

- **Targeted Support for Vulnerable Populations (64% support for enhanced low-income programs):** By maintaining income-qualified energy efficiency programs and working with trusted community organizations to reach households that may not respond to traditional utility communications.
- **Program Tracking & Accountability:** By establishing participation metrics to ensure vulnerable households are accessing programs.

#### *Alignment with Community Priorities*

Polling confirmed strong support for maintaining and expanding energy efficiency programs. Participants emphasized the need to balance clean energy goals with affordability and equity. Polling results provide clear validation that these actions address community-identified risks:

- The 91% support for both weatherization and education/outreach demonstrates overwhelming community consensus on priorities
- The 64% support for enhanced low-income programs and renewable resources confirms that affordability remains central to community concerns
- Multiple written comments and facilitator notes emphasizing natural gas reduction, heat pump transitions, and renter-focused programs validate the City's strategic direction

These insights directly shaped the CEIP, ensuring that actions reflect authentic community priorities rather than assumptions about vulnerability.

#### Indicators for 2025 CEIP

CETA requires utilities to identify indicators, developed through a public process, which can be used for measuring the distribution of costs and benefits of the actions identified in the CEIP.

Responses from workshop participants on this topic were diverse and sophisticated, reflecting demand for multi-dimensional tracking. Suggestions included:

- **Energy & cost metrics:** household savings, GHG reductions, low-income bill impacts
- **Fuel switching:** annual natural gas reduction, tracking baseboard-to-heat pump conversions
- **Program access & equity:** participation by low-income and rental households, outreach
- **Health, comfort & safety:** indoor air quality, public health improvements
- **Infrastructure & capacity:** weatherization capacity, cold-climate heat pump installations
- **Education & awareness:** school curricula, community events
- **Environmental quality:** reduced wood smoke and improved winter air quality

**Finding:** The community expects CEIP impacts to be measured holistically — spanning affordability, equity, health, environmental quality, and long-term infrastructure change.

#### *2025 CEIP Indicators for Forecasting Distribution of Costs and Benefits*

CETA requires utilities to develop indicators through public input and to use those indicators to forecast how the benefits and costs of clean energy actions will be distributed among customers, especially vulnerable populations and highly impacted communities. The September 2025 polling exercise revealed the following support from participants on indicators:

- Affordability and energy burden: Tracking the impact of CEIP on household energy bills, especially for low-income residents.
- Vulnerable Population participation: Measure how many vulnerable households access rebates, upgrades, and efficiency programs.
- Clean energy adoption: Support tracking of heat pump installations, expanded weatherization capacity, and community education programs that engage vulnerable populations.