

February 3, 2009

To: Whatcom Legacy Project Steering Committee
From: Davis, Hibbitts, & Midghall (DHM)
Re: Whatcom County Values and Beliefs Survey

I. Introduction and Methodology

This report highlights results of a telephone survey conducted to gauge Whatcom County residents' values related to growth over the next 50 years. Results from this survey will assist the County in visioning, planning, and communications.

Between January 19 and 23, 2009, DHM conducted a telephone survey of 400 residents ages 18 and older in Whatcom County. The survey lasted an average of 20 minutes. This is a sufficient sample size to assess residents' opinions generally and to review findings by multiple subgroups including gender, age, length of residency, type of area of residence, and income.

In gathering responses, DHM employed quality control measures, including questionnaire pre-testing, callbacks, and validations. In addition, quotas were established for age and gender based on the total population of Whatcom County to ensure a representative sample.¹ Computer abstracts for the survey accompany and are referenced throughout this report. They present a number of cross-tab variables based on demographic groupings. Combined percentages in the report may not always equal the sum of individual percentages because of rounding. The annotated questionnaire is appended to this report for exact wording of questions.

While current events do not always impact public opinion, it should be noted that this survey was conducted with heightened media attention to a banking crisis, major downturns in domestic and international markets, and the unemployment rate reaching close to 6.5% nationally.

Statement of Limitations: Any sampling of opinions or attitudes is subject to a margin of error, which represents the difference between a sample of a given population and the total population (here, residents of Whatcom County). For a sample size of 400, if the respondents answered a particular question in the proportion of 90% one way and 10% the other, the margin would be +/-2.94%. If they answered 50% each way, the margin would be +/-4.9%. When response categories are relatively even in size, both are numerically smaller and thus slightly less able to statistically approximate the larger population.

These plus-minus error margins represent differences between the sample and total population at a confidence interval, or probability, calculated to be 95%. This means that there is a 95% probability that the sample taken for this study would fall within the stated margins of error if compared with the results achieved from surveying the entire target population.

¹ Reference the annotated questionnaire appended to this report for census data reflecting the total population by age and gender for Whatcom County.

II. Overall Climate in Whatcom County

Residents were asked open-ended what they personally value most about living in Whatcom County today (Q1). The following table reflects results:

“Probably the beautiful sunsets and sunrises because when the sun rises, it comes up over Mount Baker.

It’s quite glorious on a clear day and when the sun sets it sets over the water.”

“The natural beauty—mountains, trees, Puget Sound—the natural beauty of those things.”

“What I used to value was when it was a small town and it wasn’t a strip mall like it’s becoming.”

“Everything is accessible. It’s smaller, I can walk to the places I need to get to, I don’t need the bus, and I’m close to the Canadian border.”

“Being by the mountains and the ocean at the same time.”

“The location. I’m on the outskirts of Bellingham, and I’m 90 minutes to Seattle, and about the same to Vancouver, BC, so I can have the amenities of a big city when I want them.”

“I like the mix of the different climate and the different areas where you can go for recreation, including the park, the beach, or the mountains.”

Table 1
Whatcom County Residents Value Most About Living in the County

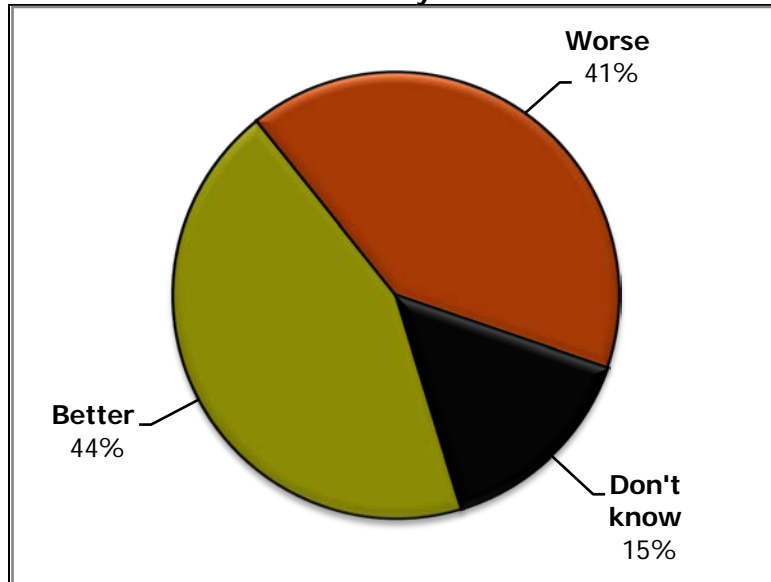
Value	Percent
Beauty/natural surroundings/scenery	23%
Small town feeling	7%
The location—general	6%
Climate/weather	6%
Outdoor activities	6%
Quality of life	6%
Community	5%
Near family	5%
Open space	5%
Clean environment	4%
Small population	4%
Good place to live—general	4%
All other responses	3% or less
Nothing	1%
Don’t know	5%

Source: Davis, Hibbitts, & Midghall, Inc, January: 2009

A plurality of 23% said they valued the beauty, natural surroundings, and scenery most, especially women and those over the age of 55. While there was little consensus on the next greatest value, around one-quarter of values centered around the area’s climate and landscape, including the location generally (6%), climate and weather (6%), outdoor activities (6%), open-space (5%), and clean environment (4%), as well as positive feelings about the community such as the small town feeling (7%), quality of life (6%), community (5%), being near family (5%), and small population (4%).

Residents were split when asked if, in terms of things they value most about living in Whatcom County, they saw the County being a better or worse place to live in the next 50 years to the year 2060 (Q2). Forty-four percent (44%) of residents thought it would be a better place to live, 41% reported it would be worse, and 15% answered “don’t know.”

Chart 1
Whatcom County in 50 Years



Source: Davis, Hibbitts, & Midghall, Inc, January: 2009

Younger residents 18-34 (52%) and those who have been living in the County for 10 years or less (59%) were most optimistic in thinking the County would be a better place to live in 50 years, compared to those ages 35-54 (39%), 55 and above (44%), those living in the County for 11-20 years (45%), and more than 20 years (33%). Additionally, residents with incomes below \$30k (58%) were also significantly more likely to report Whatcom County would be a better place to live than those with incomes \$30k and above (45%).

It should be noted that those living on working farmlands (32%) were least likely of any subgroup to think the County would be a better place to live in 50 years, and were considerably less positive than their counterparts (urbanites: 45%, living in rural areas: 46%, living in Urban Growth Area: 49%).

A plurality of those who thought the County would be a better place to live 60 years from now in 2060 (Q3) did so because they felt generally optimistic about the future of the County (21%), or because of growth (20%). Other responses are noted below in Table 2:

- “Even with the expansion that is going on in places like downtown, they are still trying to keep it a small community even though it’s a growing community.”*
- “At the moment, I am really happy with the Whatcom County Council and their vision for the future. I am confident that people from Whatcom County will continue to step up and do that job with the interests of the residents at heart.”*
- “We’re actually putting hundreds of millions of dollars into parks. We’ll have the longest and most beautiful park of anywhere along the lake. We have urban villages, inner urban trails, 1000 miles of trails through city blocks, and now they are going up to Mount Baker.”*
- “It seems to me that the community has been increasingly making the arts district better, and I see the improvements made downtown and I think they’re good.”*
- “I think we have a number of organizations that are actively trying to make the community better.”*

Table 2
Why Whatcom County Will Be a Better Place to Live In 50 Years

Response Category	Percent (n=177)
Optimistic	21%
Growth	20%
Improve—general	12%
Keep environment stable	12%
Stay the same	10%
More businesses	7%
Development control	7%
Already preparing for the future	7%
Improve economy	6%
More jobs	6%
Closely knit community	5%
More recreation	5%
Lower crime rate	5%
All other responses	4% or less
Nothing	1%
Don’t know	5%

Source: Davis, Hibbitts, & Midghall, Inc, January: 2009

While growth and development were reasons some residents thought Whatcom County would be a better place to live in 50 years, these same reasons caused concerns for residents who thought the County would be a worse place to live by 2060 (Q4).

“The urban growth plan is totally wrong and they're just expanding without thinking.”

“We are going to continue to grow—more people, less undeveloped places.”

“Too many people are coming here. Over population.”

“It's going to become overcrowded because there are more people coming in. I've seen Bellingham city limits expand a couple of times.”

“We've got too many people moving in from other areas that come in and try to change things the minute they get here.”

“More population and less opportunities for the things we like to do—the outdoor things. It's getting harder to get access to do outdoor activities, and people are vandalizing private property on Mount Baker Highway.”

“I know we're developing pretty quickly, but I liked this place when I first came because it wasn't all city—a lot of developers are going crazy and we're losing some of the natural beauty of the area.”

Table 3
Why Whatcom County Will Be a Worse Place to Live In 50 Years

Response Category	Percent (n=165)
Over populated	58%
Too much development	37%
Hurting the environment	9%
Poor government	8%
Destroying farmland	6%
Poor planning	5%
More traffic	5%
Over taxed	5%
No jobs	5%
Higher cost of living	4%
Companies leaving	4%
All other responses	3% or less
Don't know	0%

Source: Davis, Hibbitts, & Midghall, Inc, January: 2009

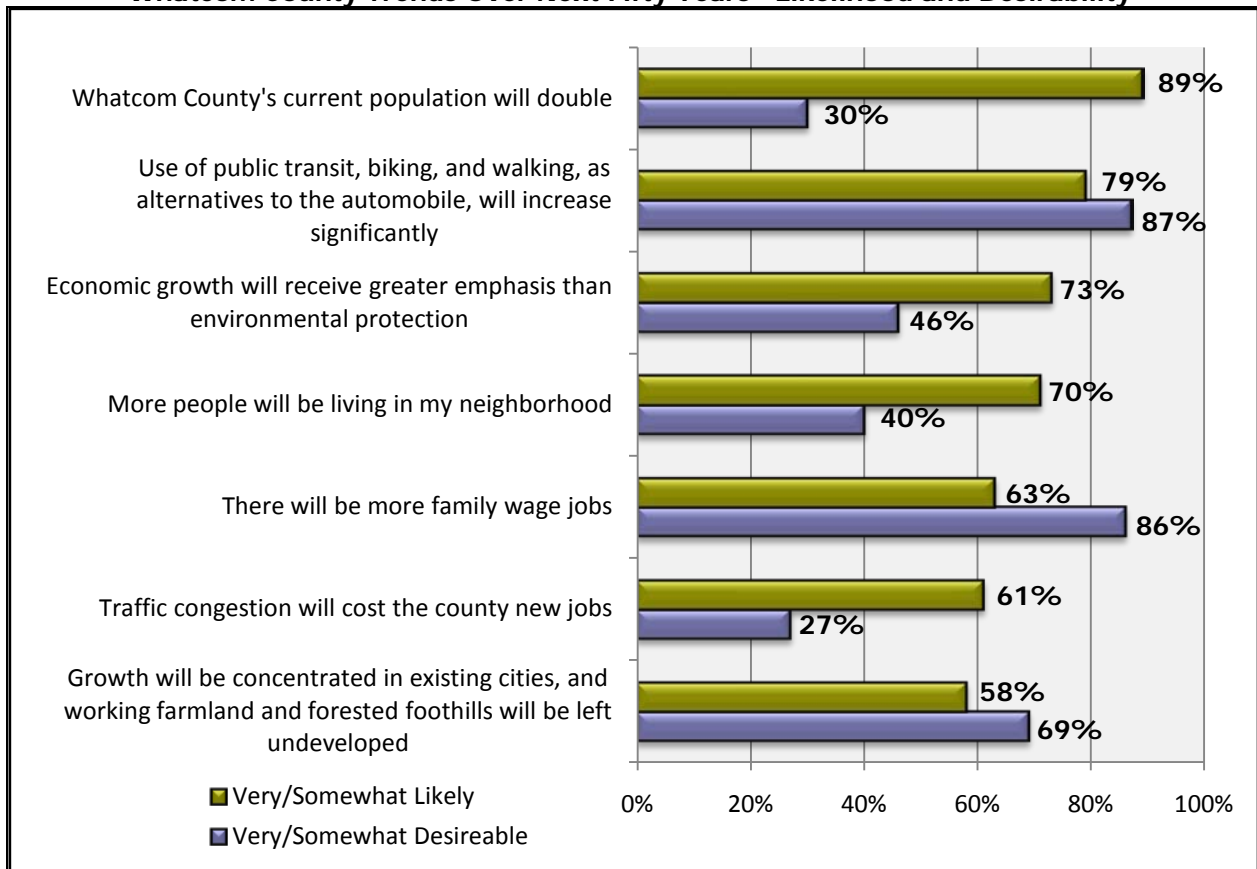
Population growth and related concerns accounted for a majority reasons residents thought Whatcom County would be a worse place to live in 2060, with more than one-half (58%) who thought it would be over-populated and 37% who believed there would be too much development.

III. Livability and Future Quality of Life

3a. future quality of life trends

Residents were read a list of statements, each being a possible trend into the future for Whatcom County, and asked first how probable they felt it was the trend would actually happen over the next 50 years, and second the desirability they personally placed on that trend happening (Q12-Q25). Fifty-eight percent of residents or more found each trend to be likely, but there were only three trends that a majority of one-half or more felt were desirable—the use of alternative modes of transportation, the increase in number of family wage jobs, and high density growth in existing cities.

Chart 2
Whatcom County Trends Over Next Fifty Years—Likelihood and Desirability



Source: Davis, Hibbitts, & Midghall, Inc, January: 2009

Nine in ten residents (89%) thought it was likely that *Whatcom County's current population will double in the next 50 years*, with 60% who said it was “very” likely. This trend, however, was viewed as undesirable by residents, with only 30% who found it desirable (very desirable: 8%, somewhat desirable: 22%), and two-thirds (67%) who thought it was not desirable.

While high majorities of all subgroups found this trend to be likely, there were subgroup differences in levels of likelihood. Older residents ages 55 and above (71%) and those ages 35-54 (62%) were significantly more likely than younger residents ages 18-24 (49%) to find this trend “very” likely.

As mentioned, a majority (67%) of residents considered this trend as not desirable, especially older residents ages 35 and above (70%), residents with incomes above \$30k (71%), longer term residents living in the County for 11 years or more (72%), and those living in rural (73%) areas. While still a majority, residents *least* likely to find this trend not desirable were those ages 18-34 (60%), residents with incomes under \$30k (59%), and those living in the County for 10 years or less (56%).

The small portion of residents who said it was *not likely* that the County would double in the next 50 years were asked what they thought would likely happen to Whatcom County's population in that same time frame in terms of growth (Q26). Most believed the County would grow, but were undecided about the amount of growth:

N=41

- Will grow, but not double: **27%**
- Steady growth: **17%**
- Grow by twenty-five percent: **10%**
- Grow by 41-49%: **10%**
- No businesses are coming in: **7%**
- No jobs: **7%**

Large majorities found *the use of public transit, biking, and walking as an alternative to the automobile increasing significantly in the next 50 years* as both a likely (79%) and desirable (87%) trend. In addition, six in ten (60%) residents reported they found it “very” desirable.

While majorities of all subgroups found this trend likely and desirable, it should be noted that residents living in the County for 20 years or less (67%) and those living in urban (67%) or rural to urban (67%) were most passionate and likely to find it “very” desirable.

Almost three-quarters (73%) of residents thought it was likely that *economic growth will receive greater emphasis than environmental protection in the next 50 years*, with residents almost split between it being “somewhat” or “very” likely. Slightly less than one-half (46%), however, saw this trend as being desirable.

The most notable subgroup difference was found by income, with those with incomes under \$30k (88%) being most likely to have found this trend likely, compared to those with incomes \$30k and above (71%). In terms of desirability, those with incomes below \$30k (48%), between \$30k and \$50k (43%), and between \$50k and \$75k (35%) were considerably less likely than those with incomes above \$75k (57%) to find this trend desirable. In addition, residents living in the County for less than five years (57%) were also more likely than their counterparts to have found this trend desirable (5 years or more: 44%).

Next, 70% of residents said it was likely that *more people will be living in their neighborhood in the next 50 years*, with one-half (50%) who thought it was “very” likely. A minority of 40% found this to be desirable.

Those living in the County between 5 and 10 years (84%) and in rural to urban areas (82%) or the Urban Growth Area (79%) were most likely to find this trend likely. By desirability, shorter term residents living in the County for 10 years or less (54%) were more likely to find this trend desirable compared to those living in the County for 11 years or more (34%).

By age, residents ages 35-54 (66%) were less likely than younger residents ages 18-34 (73%) and residents ages 55 and above (74%) to find this trend likely, and those ages 55 and above (46%) were more likely than those ages 35 and under (38%) to find the trend desirable.

Just over six in ten residents (63%) thought it was likely that there will be ***more family wage jobs in the County over the next 50 years***, with a plurality of 46% finding it only “somewhat” likely. A high majority found this to be a desirable trend (86%), with almost two-thirds who said it was “very” desirable (64%).

While not statistically significant, women (66%) were slightly more likely than men (59%) to find this trend likely, and while more than eight in ten of all respondents found the trend to be desirable, women (68%) were more likely than men (59%) to find the trend “very” desirable.

Those with incomes below \$30k (73%) were more optimistic than their counterparts in terms of an increase in family wage jobs over this next 50 years compared to those with incomes above \$30k (61%), as were those living in the County for less than five years (71%) compared to longer term residents living in the County for 5 years or more (61%). These subgroups were, however, almost equal in the high level of desire they placed on this trend.

By age, there were differences in the passion level of desirability for this trend, with residents ages 54 and under (67%) more likely than those ages 55 and above (56%) to have found this more (“very”) desirable. Additionally, those living in urban (74%), rural to urban (70%) areas, and Urban Growth Area (67%) found this trend more “very” desirable than those living on working farms (59%) and rural areas (50%).

Sixty-one percent (61%) of residents thought it was likely that ***traffic congestion will cost the County new jobs in the next 50 years***, but only one-quarter (27%) found this trend to be desirable.

Residents with incomes below \$30k (77%), and those living in the County for less than 5 years (70%) perceived this trend to be more likely compared to their counterparts (\$30k-\$50k: 62%, \$50k-\$75k: 51%, and \$75k+: 58%, length of residence more than 5 years: 60%).

While majorities of all subgroups found this trend to be not desirable, this was especially so among those ages 18-24 (74%), those living in the County for 20 years or less (72%), and those living in urban (73%), rural to urban (72%), and urban growth areas (77%).

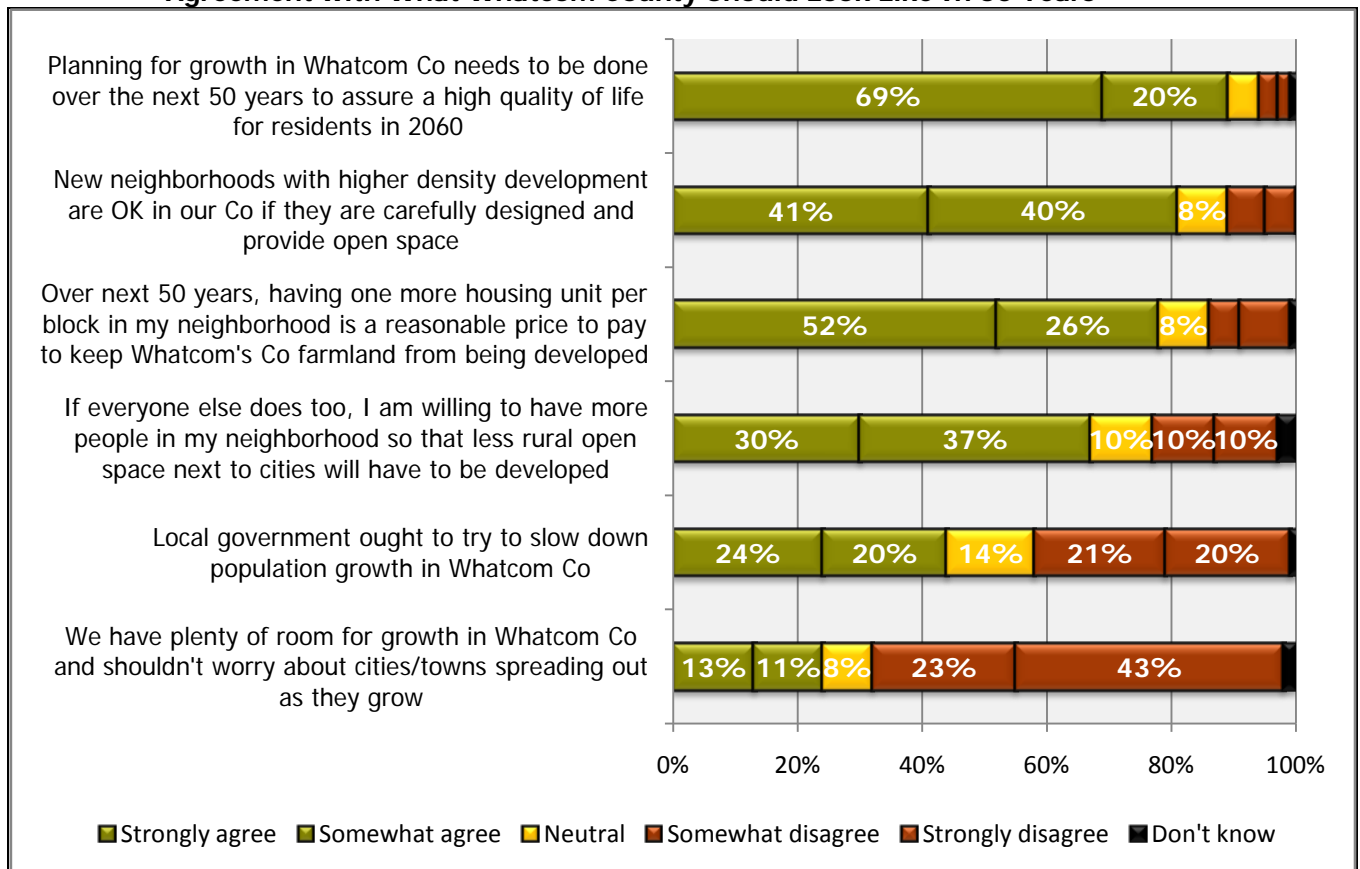
Fifty-eight percent (58%) of residents thought it was likely that *the growth in the County will be concentrated in existing cities, and working farmland and forested foothills will be left undeveloped in the next 50 years*, and seven in ten (69%) residents found this somewhat or very desirable.

Residents living on working farmlands (70%) and in rural areas (66%) found this more likely than those living in urban (55%) and rural to urban (51%) areas, and those living in the Urban Growth Area (49%). More than six in ten of each of these subgroups also found this trend to be desirable, and was viewed as more desirable by residents ages 54 and under (71%) than those ages 55 and above (63%), as well as by residents with incomes above \$30k (70%) compared to those with incomes under \$30k (59%).

3b. future livability trends

Residents were read a list of statements related to Whatcom County over the next 50 years and asked if they strongly agreed, somewhat agreed, were neutral, somewhat disagreed, or strongly disagreed with each statement (Q30-Q35).

Chart 3
Agreement with What Whatcom County Should Look Like In 50 Years



Source: Davis, Hibbitts, & Midghall, Inc, January: 2009

At the top, a very high majority of 89% agreed that *planning for growth in Whatcom County needs to be done over the next 50 years to assure a high quality of life for residents in 2060*, with 69% who agreed “strongly.”

While around nine in ten of all subgroups agreed with the statement, residents ages 35 and above (71%) were more likely than those ages 18-34 (64%) to agree “strongly,” as were residents with incomes above \$30k (75%) compared those with incomes under \$30k (56%). Residents living in the County between 5 and 10 years (74%), 11 and 20 years (77%), and those living in rural to urban areas (80%) also agreed “strongly” with this statement.

Eighty percent (80%) of residents agreed that *new neighborhoods with higher density development are okay in the County if they are carefully designed and provide open space*, with residents almost evenly split in their level of agreement (strongly: 41%, somewhat: 40%).

While high majorities of all subgroups agreed with this statement, women (45%), residents ages 35 and above (45%), and residents living in the Urban Growth Area (49%) or rural to urban areas (44%) were most likely to agree “strongly.”

Not far behind, 79% (52% strongly) of residents agreed that *over the next 50 years, having one more housing unit per block in their neighborhood, if everyone else does, is a reasonable price to pay to keep Whatcom County’s working farmland from being developed*. Longer term residents living in the County for 11 years or more (55%) were more likely to agree “strongly” than those residents who have lived in the County for 10 years or less (45%).

Next, two-thirds (67%) of residents agreed with the statement, *“if everyone else does too, I am willing to have more people live in my neighborhood so that less rural open space next to existing city boundaries will have to be developed in Whatcom County.”* Urbanites (79%) and those living in the Urban Growth Area (81%) were significantly more likely to agree with this statement than those living in rural to urban areas (69%), rural areas (57%), or working farms (46%).

Residents were split in their agreement with the statement that *local government ought to try to slow down population growth in Whatcom County*, with 44% who agreed, 40% who disagreed, and 14% who were neutral.

Residents living in the County for 11 years or more (50%), those living in rural to urban areas (56%), and those living in the Urban Growth Boundary (49%) were more likely than their counterparts to agree with the statement.

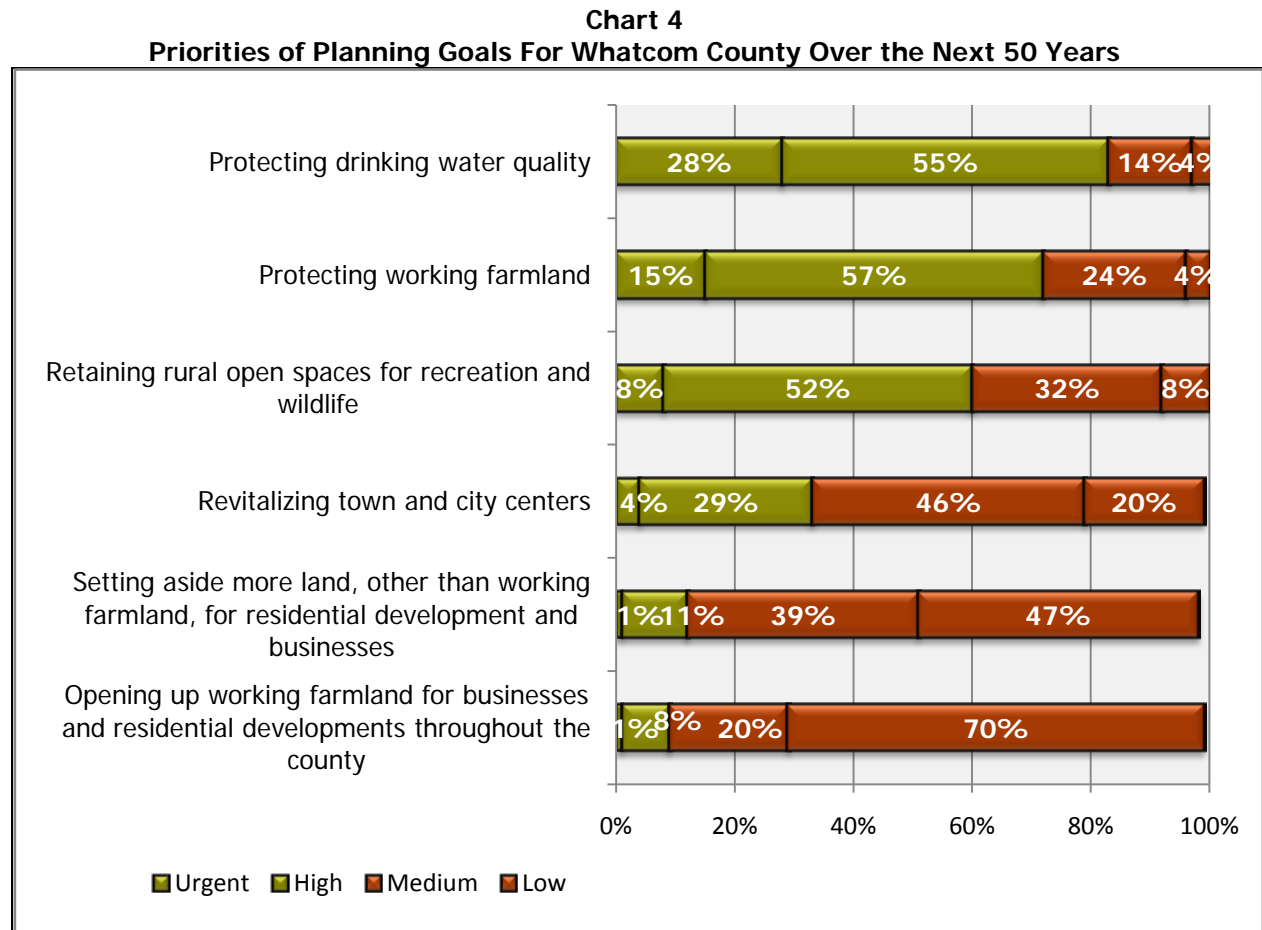
At the bottom, less than one-quarter (24%) agreed with the statement that *they have plenty of room for growth in Whatcom County and shouldn’t worry about the cities and towns spreading as they grow*, 8% were neutral, and a majority of 66% disagreed.

While six in ten subgroups or more disagreed with this statement, those ages 35 and above (49%), residents with incomes between \$50k and \$75k (56%), and those living in the Urban Growth Area (49%) were most likely to disagree “strongly.”

IV. Planning Goals

4a. planning priorities

Residents were read a list of goals for local government and asked if they were an urgent, high, medium, or low-priority (Q6-Q11). All planning goals were seen as urgent by less than three in ten residents, and only three were seen as an urgent or high priority by a majority of 52% or more residents. The following chart reflects results in order of the most urgent and high goals:



Protecting drinking water quality was at the top of priorities for planning goals, with 83% who said it was an urgent or high priority. Older residents ages 55 and above (94%) found this more of an urgent or high priority than those ages 54 and younger (79%).

It should also be noted that eight in ten residents living in all areas *except* working farms reported this as an urgent or high priority.

A distant second, 71% thought ***protecting working farmland*** should be an urgent or high priority, especially women (77%) and residents with incomes between \$30k and \$50k (80%).

Priority levels among type of area were fairly comparable, however those living on working farmlands (78%) and in rural areas (76%) were slightly more likely than their counterparts to find it an urgent or high priority (urbanites: 70%, Urban Growth Area: 70%, rural to urban: 66%).

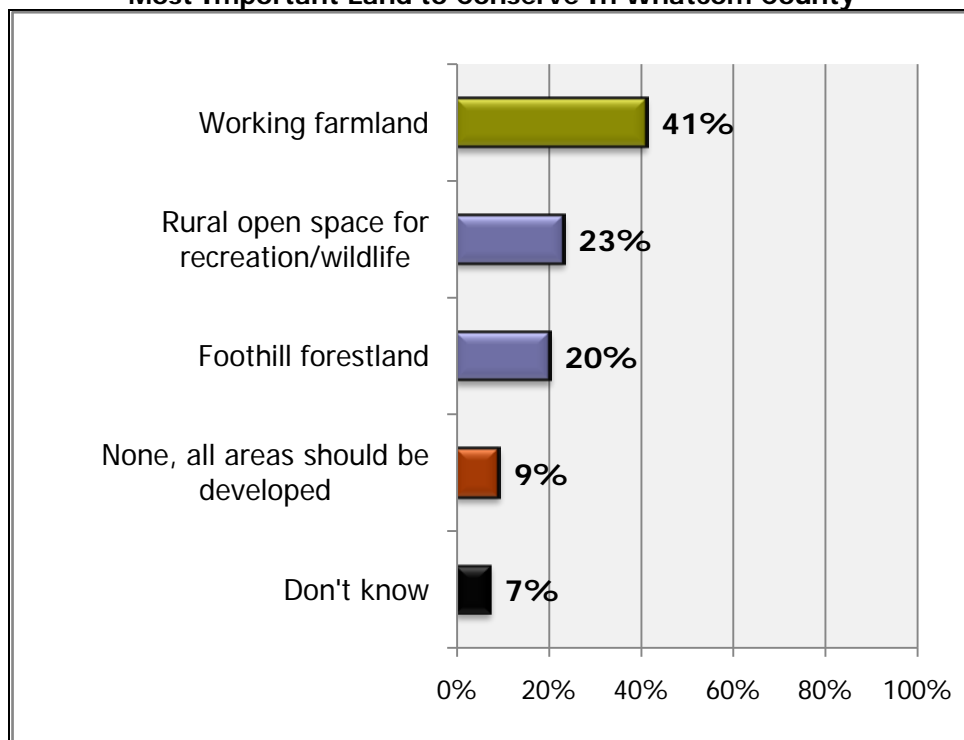
Next, 60% of residents thought *retaining rural open space for recreation and wildlife* was an urgent or high priority, distantly followed by one-third (32%) of residents who thought *revitalizing town and city centers* was an urgent or high priority.

Significantly more towards the bottom, 13% of residents thought *setting aside more land, other than working farmland, for residential development and business* was an urgent or high priority, 39% thought it was a medium priority, and 47% thought it was a low priority.

Last, only 9% thought it was a high or urgent priority to *open up working farmland for business and residential developments throughout the County*, while 20% thought it was a medium priority, and a high 70% found it a low priority.

Residents were read a list of different land types outside the city boundaries in Whatcom County and asked which was more important to conserve over the next 50 years (Q5).

Chart 5
Most Important Land to Conserve In Whatcom County



Source: Davis, Hibbitts, & Midghall, Inc, January: 2009

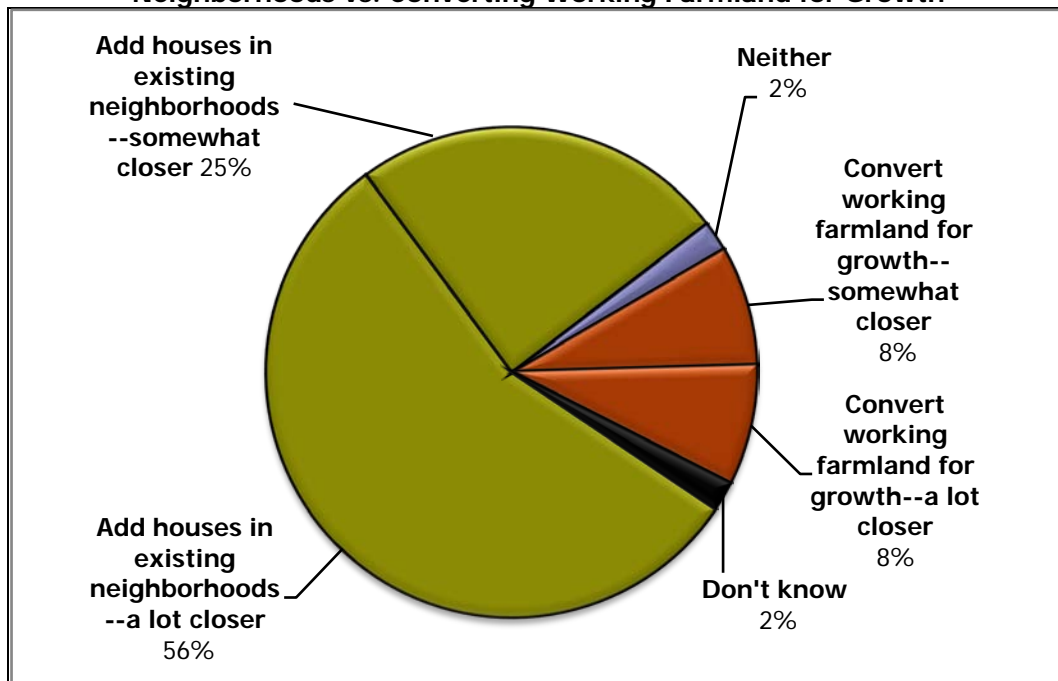
A plurality of 41% thought working farmland was important to conserve, especially older residents ages 35 and above (44%), those living in the Urban Growth Area (44%), and residents living on working farm land (59%).

Next, 23% felt rural open-space used for recreation and wildlife was most important, followed by foothill forest land, thought most important to conserve by 20% of residents. Only 9% of residents thought that all areas should be developed.

4b. trade-offs

When considering only two possible options to accommodate population growth in the County—adding houses in established neighborhoods or converting existing farmland (Q28)—eight in ten residents (80%) reported that adding houses in existing neighborhoods instead of converting existing farmland came closer to their point of view, with 56% who said “a lot closer.” Less than two in ten (16%) said that converting working farmland came closer to their viewpoint, and 2% said neither.

**Chart 6
Accommodating Population Growth In Whatcom County: Adding Houses In Existing Neighborhoods vs. Converting Working Farmland for Growth**



Source: Davis, Hibbitts, & Midghall, Inc, January: 2009

While around eight in ten of all subgroups reported adding houses in existing neighborhoods came closer to their point of view, there were differences in passion levels, with women (60%), those with incomes between \$30 and \$75k (62%), those living in the area for less than 5 years (64%), and those living in the Urban Growth Area (60%) who were most likely to have said building in existing neighborhoods came “a lot closer” to their view.

Residents were asked open-ended what kind of areas of Whatcom County they thought should be conserved and not designated as population growth areas over the next 50 years (Q36). The following table reflects results.

“I think about every aspect of our city could have denser population. As long as they don't use farm areas.”

“Existing farmlands should be left as they are, as well as forested areas. Also, places along the coast should be kept natural, and parks should be preserved.”

Agricultural areas and grounds should be conserved—you'll never get agricultural ground back, and our food comes off of it.”

“Farmlands and park and like recreation areas because it's important to keep the farms we need, like the berry farms and dairy cows.”

“Forest land, working farmland, and our ocean front (what's left of it) because can't go back once you've done it—they're not renewable. Once they're developed, it's irreversible.”

Table 4
Areas In Whatcom County That Should Be Conserved Over the Next 50 Years

Response Category	Percent
Farmlands	49%
Forests	22%
Park lands	17%
Water fronts	14%
Foothills	12%
Wildlife habitats	9%
Recreational areas	9%
Lakes/Rivers	9%
Wetlands	8%
Open/undeveloped spaces	7%
Mountain areas	6%
All other responses	5% or less
Nothing/None/Refused	2%
Don't know	6%

Source: Davis, Hibbitts, & Midghall, Inc, January: 2009

Almost a majority (49%) thought farmlands were most important to conserve over the next 50 years, with residents ages 35-54 (54%) finding it more important than their counterparts (18-34: 42%, 55 and above: 46%). Residents with incomes \$30k or above (53%) and those living on working farmlands (57%) or in the Urban Growth Area (47%) also found conserving farmlands more important.

Other land residents felt was important to conserve were natural areas and those used for recreational use, including forest lands (22%) and park lands (17%), waterfronts (14%), and foothills (12%).

There was no specific consensus, however, when asked what types of areas in Whatcom County population growth should be concentrated (Q37), although most reported urban areas such as those within the city limits (27%), established areas (13%), Bellingham (12%), or smaller towns/cities (11%). The following table reflects results.

“Closer to Bellingham is okay, like the south end of Bellingham. That's pretty much it. I want the rest pretty much left alone.”

“Direct the growth to Bellingham, not to the outlying regions.”

“Bellingham/Ferndale area because those are the areas that are already highly developed so the population growth should continue to grow there.”

“I think it should be concentrated in the population center which already exists. “

“Near downtown there are lots of areas that have buildings such as retail and apartments near Railroad Avenue. That sort of planning is very good.”

“Existing neighborhoods because the neighborhoods are already developed so it makes most sense to build there.”

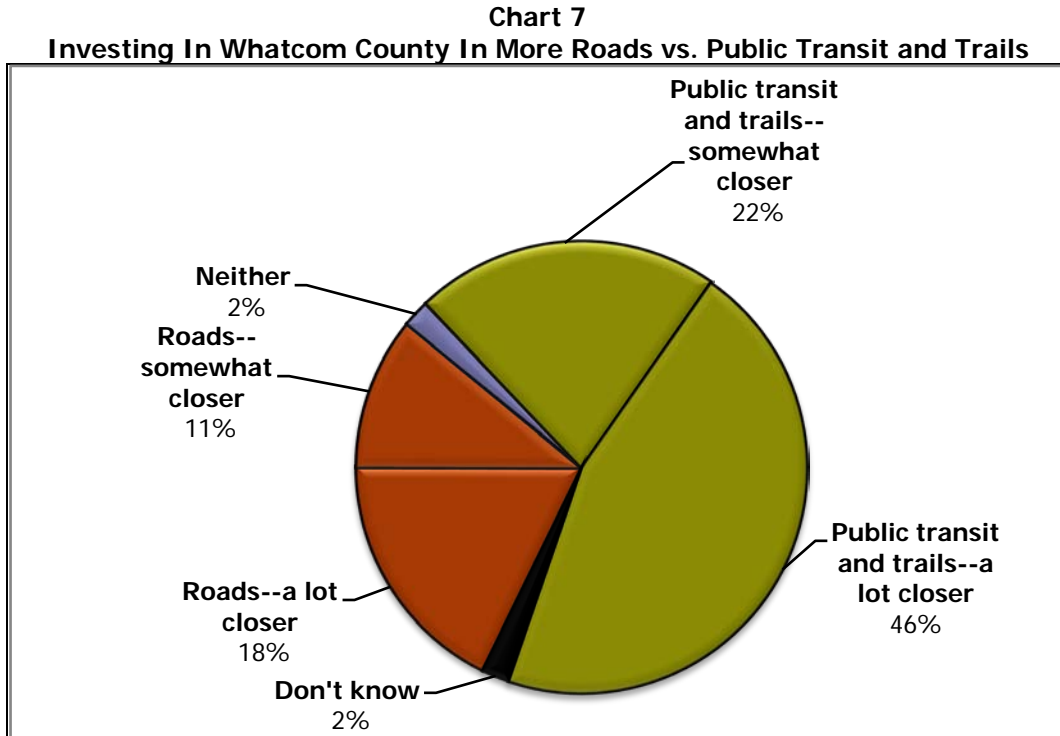
“The existing downtown area, such as Bellingham downtown, and I think the established neighborhoods should keep having growth, but it shouldn't keep sprawling out to the farmlands.”

Table 5
Areas In Whatcom County Where Population Growth Should Be Concentrated Over the Next 50 Years

Response Category	Percent
Within city limits	27%
Established areas	13%
Bellingham	12%
Smaller towns/cities	11%
Ferndale	9%
Existing neighborhoods	8%
Downtown	6%
In areas not suitable for farming	6%
All other responses	4% or less
Nothing/None/Refused	4%
Don't know	11%

Source: Davis, Hibbitts, & Midghall, Inc, January: 2009

Residents were asked if investing in more roads or investing in public transit came closer to the way they felt (Q27). Two-thirds (67%) of residents felt the county should invest in more public transit and trails, with 46% who felt it came “a lot closer” to their point of view, while 29% reported investing in more roads came somewhat (11%) or a lot (18%) closer to their view.

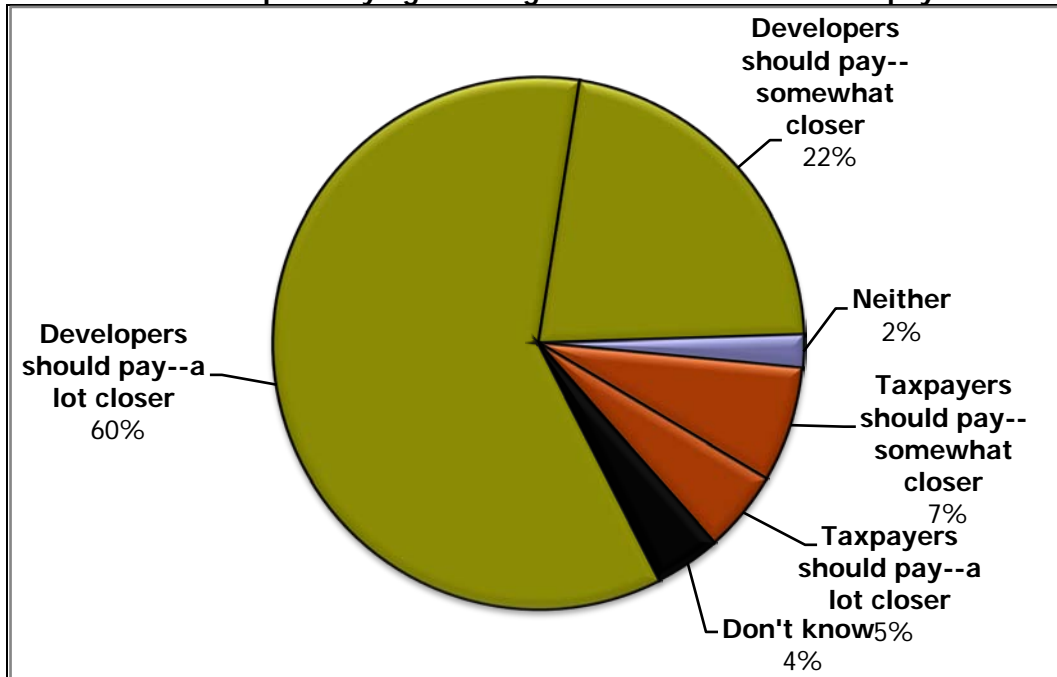


Source: Davis, Hibbitts, & Midghall, Inc, January: 2009

Women (75%) were considerably more likely to think the County should invest in more public transit or trails than men (59%), as were younger residents 18-34 (73%) and those ages 55 and above (70%) compared to those 35-54 (60%). By income, residents with incomes below \$50k (71%), those living in the county for more than 5 years (68%), and those living in urban (73%), urban to rural (75%), and Urban Growth Areas (72%) also were more likely than their counterparts to have reported investing in public transit and trails came closer to their view.

When asked if they felt land developers should pay to bring public services like water, sewer, and roads to their property, or that those costs are the price that taxpayers should pay for a growing economy, a high majority of 82% said that the burden should fall on developers came closer to their view, with 60% said it came “a lot closer.” Just over one in ten (12%) thought taxpayers should pay for those services (Q29).

Chart 8
Land Developers Paying To Bring In Public Services vs. Taxpayers



Source: Davis, Hibbitts, & Midghall, Inc, January: 2009

Residents ages 35 and above (68%) and those with incomes above \$50k (67%) were most likely to say their view came “a lot closer” to developers paying to bring public services to their property, especially when compared to their counterparts (18-34: 44%, incomes below \$50k: 54%).

V. Observations and Conclusions

Residents value the landscape and location of Whatcom County and what those things add to their quality of life including the beauty and natural surroundings, climate, clean environment, open spaces, and the small town feeling and community.

Residents were split as to whether the County will be a better or worse place to live in the next 50 years, with older residents and those living on working farms who were especially pessimistic. More optimistic residents thought the County would practice smart growth as it developed, while those who thought it would be a worse place to live reported their concerns about population growth and the potential loss of undeveloped and natural areas as the County grows.

To that end, a majority of residents did not think there is plenty of room for growth in the County and that people shouldn't worry about cities spreading as they grow, rather, an overwhelming majority thought planning for growth over the next 50 years should be done to assure a high quality of life for residents.

Elements of planning for which residents showed their support were high density growth in cities and existing neighborhoods so less natural space and working farmland will need to be developed in the future. In fact, residents greatly value preserving working farmland, natural areas, and open spaces used by wildlife and for recreational activities. In addition, residents reported it is both important and desirable to invest in more public transit and trails as the County develops.

While majorities of residents found it likely that the County will double in size, economic growth will receive more emphasis than environmental protection, more people will live in their neighborhood, and traffic congestion will cause job loss in the County, majorities found all these trends to undesirable. Trends they found desirable were the increased use of public transit, biking, and walking as alternatives to the automobile, more family-wage jobs, and growth concentrated in existing cities while working farmland and forested foothills are left undeveloped.

In terms of who should pay to bring public services like water, sewer, and roads to their property, residents were significantly more likely to think it should be paid by developers and not by taxpayers. Some may be of the opinion that because they are not completely in favor or in support of growth and development in the County, they therefore should not have to pay for it.

Demographic differences in the survey were most often found by age, length and type of area of residence, and income. Younger and shorter term residents, urbanites, and those with smaller incomes were more supportive of growth and expansion in the County, however they *did* find the conservation of natural areas, high density development, and the use of alternative modes of transportation as very important elements of growth and development.

2009 WHATCOM COUNTY VALUES AND BELIEFS SURVEY
Davis, Hibbitts & Midghall, Inc.
N=400; age 18+ Random Digit Dialing sample; Whatcom County
January, 2009

(Percentages may not add to 100% for some questions because of rounding and/or allowing multiple responses.)

I. QUALITY OF LIFE ISSUES IDENTIFICATION

1. What do you personally value most about living in Whatcom County today? **(OPEN. ACCEPT ONE RESPONSE)**

Response Category	%
Beauty/Natural surrounding/Scenery	23%
Small town feeling	7%
The location—General	6%
Climate/Weather	6%
Outdoor activities	6%
Quality of life	6%
Community	5%
Near family	5%
Open space	5%
Clean environment	4%
Small population	4%
Good place to live—General	4%
All other responses	3% or less
Nothing/None/Refused	1%
Don't know	5%

2. Looking ahead over the next 50 years to the year 2060, and in terms of the things you value most about living in Whatcom County, do you see the county being a better or worse place to live?

Statement	%
Better	44%
Worse	41%
Don't know	15%

3. **(IF BETTER TO Q2) Why? (OPEN)**

Response Category	% n=177
Optimistic	21%
Growth	20%
Improve—General	12%
Keep environment stable	12%
Stay the same	10%
More businesses	7%
Development control	7%
Already preparing for the future	7%
Improve economy	6%
More jobs	6%
Closely knit community	5%
More recreation	5%
Lower crime rate	5%
All other responses	4% or less
Nothing/None/Refused	1%
Don't know	5%

4. **(IF WORSE TO Q2) Why? (OPEN)**

Response Category	% n=165
Over populated	58%
Too much development	37%
Hurting the environment	9%
Poor government	8%
Destroying farmland	6%
Poor planning	5%
More traffic	5%
Over taxed	5%
No jobs	5%
Higher cost of living	4%
Companies leaving	4%
All other responses	3% or less
Don't know	0%

II. LONG TERM PLANNING GOALS – PRIORITIZATION

5. I'm going to read to you a short list of different land types outside city boundaries in Whatcom County. Tell me which one is **most important** to conserve over the next 50 years. **(ROTATE)**

Statement	%
Working farmland	41%
Rural open space used for recreation and wildlife	23%
Foothill forestland	20%
None, all areas should be developed	9%
Don't know	7%

I'm going to read you a list of broadly worded county planning goals. Over the next fifty years, your local governments will be facing many difficult issues related to the population growth projected for Whatcom County. With limited resources, they won't be able to do everything and must establish priorities. What priority should local governments give to each goal: low priority, medium priority, high priority, or urgent priority? Try not to say urgent for all the goals. Be selective in your rating. Also, remember that we're talking about goals over the next fifty years. You may have other goals in mind, but please limit your answers for now to just the goals I'm going to read you. **(ROTATE)**

Statement	Low Priority	Medium Priority	High Priority	Urgent Priority	DK
6. Revitalizing town and city centers	20%	46%	29%	4%	2%
7. Protecting working farmland	4%	24%	57%	15%	1%
8. Retaining rural open space for recreation and wildlife	8%	32%	52%	8%	1%
9. Opening up working farmland for businesses and residential developments throughout the county	70%	20%	8%	1%	1%
10. Protecting drinking water quality	4%	14%	55%	28%	0%
11. Setting aside more land, other than working farmland, for residential development and businesses	47%	39%	11%	1%	1%

III. TRENDS

I am now going to read to you a series of statements, each one being a possible trend into the future for Whatcom County. For each trend, please rate **FIRST** the probability you think that the trend will actually happen over the next 50 years (not at all likely, not very likely, somewhat likely, or very likely), and **SECOND**, the desirability you personally place on that trend happening (not at all desirable, not very desirable, somewhat desirable, or very desirable). Remember that we're talking about **POSSIBLE** trends for Whatcom County and over the next 50 years. **(ROTATE)**

- 12-13. Whatcom County's current population will double. **[IF NOT VERY/NOT AT ALL LIKELY TO Q12, ASK Q13-Q25, THEN ASK Q26. ALL OTHER RESPONSES, ASK Q13-Q25, THEN ASK Q27]**

Likelihood:

Response Category	%
Not at all likely	2%
Not very likely	9%
Somewhat likely	29%
Very likely	60%
Don't know	1%

Desirability:

Response Category	%
Not at all desirable	31%
Not very desirable	36%
Somewhat desirable	22%
Very desirable	8%
Don't know	3%

- 14-15. Economic growth will receive greater emphasis than environmental protection.

Likelihood:

Response Category	%
Not at all likely	4%
Not very likely	20%
Somewhat likely	39%
Very likely	34%
Don't know	3%

Desirability:

Response Category	%
Not at all desirable	24%
Not very desirable	26%
Somewhat desirable	28%
Very desirable	19%
Don't know	4%

16-17. Use of public transit, biking, and walking, as alternatives to the automobile, will increase significantly.

Likelihood:

Response Category	%
Not at all likely	4%
Not very likely	16%
Somewhat likely	38%
Very likely	41%
Don't know	1%

Desirability:

Response Category	%
Not at all desirable	5%
Not very desirable	8%
Somewhat desirable	27%
Very desirable	60%
Don't know	1%

18-19. Growth will be concentrated in existing cities, and working farmland and forested foothills will be left undeveloped.

Likelihood:

Response Category	%
Not at all likely	10%
Not very likely	30%
Somewhat likely	38%
Very likely	20%
Don't know	3%

Desirability:

Response Category	%
Not at all desirable	13%
Not very desirable	17%
Somewhat desirable	26%
Very desirable	43%
Don't know	2%

20-21. Traffic congestion will cost the county new jobs.

Likelihood:

Response Category	%
Not at all likely	9%
Not very likely	23%
Somewhat likely	33%
Very likely	28%
Don't know	7%

Desirability:

Response Category	%
Not at all desirable	33%
Not very desirable	36%
Somewhat desirable	18%
Very desirable	9%
Don't know	5%

22-23. There will be more family-wage jobs.

Likelihood:

Response Category	%
Not at all likely	6%
Not very likely	26%
Somewhat likely	46%
Very likely	17%
Don't know	5%

Desirability:

Response Category	%
Not at all desirable	5%
Not very desirable	7%
Somewhat desirable	22%
Very desirable	64%
Don't know	3%

24-25. More people will be living in my neighborhood.

Likelihood:

Response Category	%
Not at all likely	9%
Not very likely	20%
Somewhat likely	21%
Very likely	50%
Don't know	1%

Desirability:

Response Category	%
Not at all desirable	27%
Not very desirable	30%
Somewhat desirable	29%
Very desirable	11%
Don't know	3%

26. **(IF NOT VERY/NOT AT ALL LIKELY TO Q12)** You said that it is not likely that Whatcom County's current population will double over the next 50 years. What do you think will likely happen to Whatcom County's population over the next 50 years in terms of growth? **(OPEN)**

Response Category	% n=41
Will grow, but not double	27%
Steady growth	17%
25%	10%
41-50%	10%
No businesses are coming in	7%
Small amount	5%
20-30%	5%
Increase in cost of living	5%
All other responses	2% or less
Don't know	10%

IV. TRADEOFFS – PLANNING GOALS AND QUALITY OF LIFE ISSUES

(Ask All)

I'm now going to read to you some statements about what needs to be done in Whatcom County over the next 50 years to assure a high quality of life in 2060. For each one, tell me which statement comes closest to your feelings. Some of the choices will not be easy but give them your best try. Let's start with _____. **(Follow each question with: Is that only somewhat or a lot closer to your feelings.) (ROTATE Q27-Q29)**

27. Some people feel we should invest in more roads. Other people think that public transit and trails represents a better investment. Which way do you feel?

Statement	%
Roads—a lot closer	18%
Roads—somewhat closer	11%
Public transit and trails—somewhat closer	22%
Public transit and trails—a lot closer	46%
Neither (volunteered)	2%
Don't know	2%

28. Considering only two of the possible options to accommodate population growth, some people say it is better to add houses in established neighborhoods than to convert working farmland. Others say it is better to convert working farmland than add houses in established neighborhoods. Which way do you feel?

Statement	%
Add houses in existing neighborhoods—a lot closer	56%
Add houses in existing neighborhoods—somewhat closer	25%
Convert working farmland for growth—somewhat closer	8%
Convert working farmland for growth—a lot closer	8%
Neither (volunteered)	2%
Don't know	2%

29. Some people say land developers should pay to bring public services like water, sewer, and roads to their property. Others say those costs are the price that taxpayers should pay for a growing economy. Which way do you feel?

Statement	%
Developers should pay—a lot closer	60%
Developers should pay—somewhat closer	22%
Taxpayers should pay—somewhat closer	7%
Taxpayers should pay—a lot closer	5%
Neither (volunteered)	2%
Don't know	4%

IV. AGREE/DISAGREE STATEMENTS – TRIANGULATION FOR KEY ISSUES

I'm now going to read to you some statements related to what we want Whatcom County to be like over the next 50 years. For each one, please tell me if you disagree strongly, disagree somewhat, agree somewhat, or agree strongly. If you feel neutral about it or don't know, just say so.

Statement	Disagree Strongly	Disagree Somewhat	Neutral	Agree Somewhat	Agree Strongly	DK
30. Planning for growth in Whatcom County needs to be done over the next 50 years to assure a high quality of life for residents in 2060	2%	3%	5%	20%	69%	2%
31. New neighborhoods with higher density development are OK in our county if they are carefully designed and provide open space	5%	6%	8%	40%	41%	2%
32. If everyone else does too, I am willing to have more people live in my neighborhood so that less rural open space next to existing city boundaries will have to be developed in Whatcom County	10%	10%	10%	37%	30%	3%
33. We have plenty of room for growth in Whatcom County and shouldn't worry about the cities and towns spreading out as they grow	43%	23%	8%	11%	13%	2%
34. Local government ought to try to slow down population growth in Whatcom County	20%	21%	14%	20%	24%	2%
35. Over the next 50 years, having one more housing unit per block in my neighborhood, if everyone else does, is a reasonable price to pay to keep Whatcom County's working farmland from being developed	8%	5%	8%	26%	52%	2%

36. Describe the kind of areas of Whatcom County that should be conserved and not designated as population growth areas over the next 50 years. Be as specific as you can. **(OPEN)**

Response Category	%
Farmlands	49%
Forests	22%
Park lands	17%
Water fronts	14%
Foothills	12%
Wildlife habitats	9%
Recreational areas	9%
Lakes/rivers	9%
Wetlands	8%
Open/undeveloped spaces	7%
Mountain area	6%
All other responses	5% or less
Nothing/None/Refused	2%
Don't know	6%

37. Describe the areas in Whatcom County where population growth should be concentrated over the next 50 years. Be as specific as you can. **(OPEN)**

Response Category	%
Within city limits	27%
Established areas	13%
Bellingham	12%
Smaller towns/cities	11%
Ferndale	9%
Existing neighborhoods	8%
Downtown	6%
In areas not suitable for farming	6%
All other responses	4% or less
Nothing/None/Refused	4%
Don't know	11%

V. DEMOGRAPHICS AND RECRUITING FOR POSSIBLE FOCUS GROUPS

38. What is your zip code? **[RECORD RESPONSE]**

39. Would you describe where you live in Whatcom County as urban, Urban Growth Area, rural changing to urban, rural, or an area of working farms?

	%
Urban	30%
Rural	28%
Rural changing to urban	15%
Urban Growth Area	11%
Area of working farms	9%
Other	5%
Refused	2%

40. Is your age between:

	% Survey	% 2005-2007 Census Data ²
18-34	31%	35%
35-54	39%	35%
55+	29%	30%
Refused	1%	--

² U.S Census Bureau Whatcom County, Washington American Fact Finder: Age and Sex, 2005-2007
http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/STTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=05000US53073&-qr_name=ACS_2007_3YR_G00_S0101&-ds_name=ACS_2007_3YR_G00_&-redoLog=false

41. Just your best guess, was your total household income before taxes in 2008 between:

	%
\$0 and \$30,000	16%
\$30,001 and \$50,000	22%
\$50,001 and \$75,000	22%
\$75,001 and \$100,000	12%
\$100,001 or more	15%
Refused	13%

42. How many years have you lived in Whatcom County?

	%
Less than 5 years	14%
5 to 10 years	16%
11 to 20 years	23%
More than 20 years	42%
Refused	5%
Mean	22.6 years

43. **(DO NOT ASK)** Gender.

	% Survey	% 2005-2007 Census Data ³
Male	48%	49%
Female	52%	51%

[RECORD FROM SAMPLE]

Focus Group Recruiting – For possible follow-up qualitative research

44. One final thing, back to the issue of Whatcom County’s quality of life in the future, would you be interested in possibly participating in a small group discussion with your friends or neighbors sometime later about this and related issues?

Yes----- 1 [Collect contact info]
 No ----- 2 [End survey]

(IF YES) Collect name, address, and telephone number.

THANK YOU FOR SHARING YOUR TIME AND OPINIONS

³ U.S Census Bureau Whatcom County, Washington American Fact Finder: Age and Sex, 2005-2007
http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/STTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=05000US53073&-qr_name=ACS_2007_3YR_G00_S0101&-ds_name=ACS_2007_3YR_G00_&-redoLog=false