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Planning Commission
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Dear Planning Commission Members:

Thank you for reviewing the Public Participation Plan for Whatcom County. We find the plan to represent a good effort to inform the public, take public comment, and to recognize that some issues deserve more discussion than others. In that the plan is aimed at predictability and openness, it does a good job. It does not succeed, however, in being responsive to citizen requests for more dialogue when citizens request more dialogue. And, it makes no mention of public hearings at the County Council level. We feel the latter must have been an oversight. Detailed comments follow:

The introduction outlines an approach where different proposals get different levels of public input and process according to their complexity and/or controversial nature. It also allows for projects to move from one Level to another, per the following: if additional public participation is required or another approach is appropriate, PDS will upgrade the item to a more vigorous approach. While this is a commendable strategy, it leaves the public out of the decision-making. The public needs a process by which they can ask for a different approach and be assured of getting one. Please include a process by which the public can elevate topics to the next level. For example, S-9, population analysis, and D-9, the concurrency amendment, might be better as a Level 3 issues rather than Level 2 issues.

Section 2.4 outlines a procedure for “comp plan and development regulations” The plan states that the Council may continue to address appeals brought to the GMHB. Does this mean that the County will respond to appeals brought to the GMHB by citizens, appeal decisions, appeal section of the comp plan, or all of the above? The section also states that public participation for settlement activities that will result in an ordinance to amend the comp plan and/or regulations will include a public hearing on the matter. Will this public participation and hearing be used to determine whether the Council will appeal a GMHB decision or to determine what action the Council takes in order to be in compliance with a GMHB decision?

Section 3.1 outlines public sectors for outreach efforts. The group “interested property owners and developers” makes mention of those who might be interested in preserving their property but does not call them out specifically. We ask that groups that work to preserve land or help establish conservation easements also be called out. These might include the Whatcom Land Trust, Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association, and the Conservation District.

Section 4.2.1, 4.3.1, and 4.4.1 mentions an e-mail list to notify interested parties. Please be specific about which list this is and how members of the public sign up.

Section 4.4.1 lists the approach for Level 3 issues, but does not include a County Council hearing. Please include a Council hearing for these issues.

Thank you for your attention to public participation. We hope that you will make the changes discussed above, in order to make the plan more robust and responsive to the public’s needs.

Sincerely,

Wendy Steffensen, Lead Scientist
Matt Krogh, North Sound Baykeeper