



PUBLIC PARTICIPATION ACTIVITIES SUMMARY

WHATCOM 2031 ■ Urban Growth Area Review ■ August 14, 2009

Introduction

Goal #11 of the Growth Management Act (GMA, RCW 36.70A) states that when planning, government should “encourage the involvement of citizens in the planning process and ensure coordination between communities and jurisdictions to reconcile conflicts.” The act further states that counties and cities planning under GMA shall engage the public in “early and continuous public participation in the development and amendment of comprehensive land use plans...” (RCW 36.70A.140).

This document serves as a summary of the public participation activities that have occurred since the beginning of the *Whatcom 2031* process for purposes of the UGA Update. Public participation in this process began with a carefully crafted Public Involvement Plan that was followed and revised as necessary and at the request of the public throughout the UGA update process. All of the activities described below helped shape the packet of proposed boundaries, population projections, and comprehensive plan amendments before the joint meeting of the planning commission and county council. This document was made available on the Whatcom 2031 Website: <http://www.co.whatcom.wa.us/pds/2031/index.jsp>.

Public Participation: An Overview of Activities

The public process for *Whatcom 2031* and the UGA update started in summer of 2008. Opportunities for public involvement in the process were diverse and frequent ranging from the educational opportunities provided by Growth Management Coordinating Council Meetings to questionnaires and comment periods to traditional workshops and hearings. The following are general descriptions of the opportunities for public input that occurred over the last year.

Growth Management Coordinating Council (GMCC)

The public participation activities for the UGA Update really begin with the GMCC. While the public was not able to make comments or ask questions in the meetings, these meetings served as a monthly touchstone for those interested in the project to find out more information about the work that was occurring. The council members’ packets were posted to the website prior to the meeting so the public could download the items and bring them to the meeting. Summaries were posted following the meeting for people who were unable to attend. Written public comments were posted to the Whatcom 2031 website and shared with GMCC members.

County Council Meetings

In addition to the advertised hearings at the County Council level, planning and development services director David Stalheim frequently visited the council’s Planning and Development Committee starting in fall 2008. The committee received regular updates on the progress of the project and the public frequently attended those committee meetings to gather more information about the project. Like the GMCC meetings, these council briefings served as way to inform the public about the planning activities that were occurring. The meetings also helped planners gauge the wishes of the council as decisions were made about methodologies and policies.

Workshops

The community participated in a number of workshops over the last several months. The County held three county-wide vision workshops in October 2008 and three alternatives workshops in March 2009. Birch Bay residents also participated in two UGA-specific workshops to sort out the issues that they were most concerned about. Since 2006, the Columbia Valley UGA residents have participated in a number of workshops in association with their subarea plan update. Workshop summaries were prepared and posted on the Whatcom 2031 website.

Hearings

The county council and planning commission held hearings to collect public input about various issues including the following:

- Land Capacity Methodology (12/9/2008 – County Council)
- Environmental Impact Statement Scoping (2/17/2009 – Joint Planning Commission and County Council)
- City UGA Proposals (6/23/2009 – County Council with an invitation extended to Planning Commission members)

The Land Capacity Methodology and UGA Proposal hearings were held exclusively in front of the County Council. The Planning Commission was present for the cities' presentations the week before the public hearing (6/16/2009) and many Planning Commissioners were in the audience at the hearing. The Environmental Impact Statement scoping hearing was held in front of a joint meeting of the County Council and Planning Commission.

Public Comment Periods

This process has had two official public comment periods in association with the scoping and release of the draft environmental impact statement (Draft EIS). The scoping comment period extended from January 28 to February 18, 2009, a 21-day period. Comments were accepted by letter, e-mail, or in person at a public open house held from noon to 7:00 p.m. on February 17, 2009, and the joint Whatcom County Planning Commission/County Council public hearing held that same evening from 7:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. The Draft EIS comment period extended from May 8 to June 22, 2009, a 45-day period, during which time written comments were accepted. During these comment periods, the County received several written comments regarding the EIS in addition to the public testimony at the hearing..

Questionnaire/Survey

The County released a questionnaire addressing community values, population and economic growth, the natural environment, transportation, and the county vision. The questionnaire was distributed via the project's website and by hand at public meetings and at select locations (largely those areas with limited access to the internet) across Whatcom County. Between October 10 and November 14, 2008 the County received 387 responses to the questionnaire. Those results were tabulated and posted on the website. They were also presented to the Growth Management Coordinating Council. The results influenced the development of EIS growth alternatives among other steps in the Whatcom 2031 process.

With assistance from Whatcom County, the Whatcom Legacy Project conducted a statistically valid phone survey about the values and beliefs of a random sample of residents. The survey

addressed questions about residents' attitudes toward population growth and land use. The results of this survey were consulted in the development of the policies and UGA boundaries presented as part of the package of proposed amendments to the comprehensive plan.

Written Comment

The County received over 100 written comments regarding the UGA update. All comments were reviewed and posted to the website. DEIS comments are being reviewed and will be provided a response in the Final EIS. Other comments were considered in drafting amendments to the comprehensive plan and drafting proposed revisions to UGA boundaries.

Public Participation Chronology

The following is a chronology of the public involvement activities that have occurred since the beginning of the UGA update process.

Date	Activity
Aug 6, 2008	GMCC Meeting 2:30-4:00 pm Whatcom Council Of Governments
Sept 3, 2008	GMCC Meeting 3:00-5:00 pm Ferndale Annex Council Chambers
Oct 1, 2008	GMCC Meeting 3:00-5:00 pm Ferndale Whatcom Educational Credit Union (WECU)
Oct 10, 2008	Questionnaire Posted to Website
Oct 15, 2008	Vision Workshop 6:30-8:30 pm Bloedel/Donovan Community Room
Oct 16, 2008	Vision Workshops 9:00-11:00 am / 6:30-8:30 pm Bellingham Public Library/Lynden Community Center
Nov 5, 2008	GMCC Meeting 3:00-5:00 pm Ferndale WECU
Nov 14, 2008	Questionnaire Removed from Website
Dec 3, 2008	GMCC Meeting 3:00-5:00 pm Ferndale WECU
Dec 9, 2009	County Council – Public Hearing (Land Capacity Methodology) 7:00 pm County Council Chambers
Jan 7, 2009	Birch Bay Steering Committee Meeting 7:00-9:00 pm Birch Bay Bible Community Church

Date	Activity
Jan 21, 2009	GMCC Meeting 3:00-5:00 pm Ferndale WECU
January 28, 2009	EIS Scoping Period Begin 21-day EIS scoping period; concluded February 18, 2009.
Feb 4, 2009	GMCC Meeting 3:00-5:00 pm Ferndale WECU
Feb 17, 2009	EIS Scoping Open House 12:00-7:00 pm Whatcom County Courthouse – Rotunda EIS Joint Planning Commission/County Council Hearing 7:00-9:00 pm Whatcom County Courthouse – Council Chambers
Mar 4, 2009	GMCC Meeting 3:00-5:00 pm Ferndale WECU
Mar 23, 2009	Growth Alternatives Workshop 7:00-9:00 pm Birch Bay Bible Community Church
Mar 24, 2009	Growth Alternatives Workshops 9:00-11:00 am / 7:00-9:00 pm Bellingham Public Library/Meridian High School
Apr 1, 2009	GMCC Meeting 3:00-5:00 pm Cornwall Church
May 6, 2009	GMCC Meeting 3:00-5:00 pm Cornwall Church
May 8, 2009	Draft EIS Begin 45-day comment period; extended to June 22, 2009.
May 18, 2009	Birch Bay Steering Committee 7:00-9:00 pm Birch Bay Bible Community Church
Jun 3, 2009	GMCC Meeting 3:00-5:00 pm Cornwall Church
Jun 16, 2009	Joint Planning Commission/County Council Workshop (City UGA Proposals) 4:00-6:00 and 7:00-9:00 pm Whatcom County Courthouse – Council Chambers

Date	Activity
Jun 23, 2009	County Council - Public Hearing (City UGA Proposals) 6:00 pm Whatcom County Courthouse – Council Chambers
Jul 1, 2009	GMCC Meeting 3:00-5:00 pm Cornwall Church

In fall 2009, County UGA proposals and associated Comprehensive Plan amendments will be presented at Planning Commission and County Council meetings and hearings. The public will be invited to provide testimony at public hearings during this time. More information about meetings will be available on the County website:
<http://www.co.whatcom.wa.us/pds/2031/index.jsp>.

Conclusion

The County has frequently consulted the public throughout the UGA update process on every issue from methodologies to visioning, boundaries to policies. The package of amendments is the County’s best attempt at addressing the concerns of Whatcom County residents while attempting to comply with GMA and the Growth Management Hearings Board order to review and revise the UGAs by December 1, 2009.

The public participation process for *Whatcom 2031*, however, does not end with the adoption of the revised UGAs. As the County continues to work toward meeting the requirements of GMA and update the entire comprehensive plan by 2011 to meet additional GMA review requirements, more opportunities for public involvement will be offered.