



# Urban Growth Area Review

**WHATCOM 2031 ■ Whatcom County Planning Commission ■  
Summary of Main Recommendations ■ October 22, 2009**

The Whatcom County Council and Planning Commission held a joint public hearing on September 17, 2009 regarding the County Executive's recommendations for amendments to the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Code. These recommendations were in response to the Growth Management Act requirement to review, at least every ten years, the urban growth areas, and the densities permitted within them.

The Whatcom County Planning Commission held work sessions to review the recommendations and public input on September 24, October 1, October 8 and October 15. On October 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Planning Commission took final action and forwarded their recommendations to the Whatcom County Council.

## County-wide Issues

The Planning Commission's preliminary recommendations make adjustments to the proposal subject to public hearing. The following is a summary of the main changes proposed by the Planning Commission:

- ◆ County Growth Forecast. The county-wide population forecast was reduced from the County Executive's recommendation of 245,973 (not including additional allocations requested for Bellingham) to 244,892. The reduction is due to a lower allocation to the City of Lynden (see Lynden description below).
- ◆ Urban Growth Area Reserves. The proposal to include Urban Growth Area Reserves has not been recommended (see Chapter 2, Land Use, starting at page 2-71). The Planning Commission has removed these Reserves and placed the land use into Rural or Resource land designations.
- ◆ Growth Allocation Reserves. The growth allocation reserves (see Chapter 1, Introduction, starting at page 1-9) have not been recommended. However, the City of Bellingham is still requested to return as part of their 2011 plan update process with a proposal for how they would accommodate a total of approximately 116,200 people.
- ◆ Capital Facilities. The requirement that capital facility plans for urban facilities must be approved by the special purpose district was deleted. This would allow the county to adopt standards and plans to ensure consistency with the county's responsibility to plan for these areas. The Planning Commission also amended a goal to make clear that these plans must be consistent with the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan.

## Bellingham

The Planning Commission's preliminary recommendations amend the County Executive's proposal in the following areas regarding the Bellingham Urban Growth Area:

- ◆ Geneva and Hillsdale Area. The Geneva and Hillsdale area that reside in the Lake Whatcom Watershed were put back into the Urban Growth Area. A policy was added to Chapter 2, Land Use (Policy 2T-11) that states only non-urban densities would be allowed in these areas. The Zoning Code for Urban Residential zones would also be amended to implement the comprehensive plan policy by limiting density in the watershed portion of the Urban Growth Area to one dwelling per five (5) acres.
- ◆ Urban Growth Area Reserve – Lake Padden Watershed. The Planning Commission recommended removal of the Urban Growth Area Reserve for the Yew Street Road area of the Lake Padden Watershed and putting the area in a Rural comprehensive plan designation. The Planning Commission also recommended Rural one dwelling/ten acre zoning.
- ◆ Bellingham-Ferndale Interface. The Bellingham and Ferndale Urban Growth Areas meet in the vicinity of Slater Road. The Planning Commission wanted to explore the feasibility of changing the zoning in the area from the current commercial designations to industrial as part of the 2011 plan and code update process. While the Planning Commission did not amend any policies regarding the separation of the urban areas, it was a topic of discussion and may be a focus of the 2011 plan update process.

## Birch Bay

The Planning Commission's preliminary recommendations amend the County Executive's proposal in the following areas regarding the Birch Bay Urban Growth Area:

- ◆ Urban Growth Boundary and Reserves. The Urban Growth Boundary proposed by the Executive was accepted. However, the Urban Growth Area Reserves was not recommended and those areas were put back into a Rural land use category.
- ◆ Provisional Rezone at Blaine and Alderson Road. The provisional rezone adopted in 2004-049 was removed as recommended by the Executive and replaced with URM(24) and General Commercial. The requirement to acquire Transfer of Development Rights to achieve the higher density would remain.

## Blaine

The Planning Commission's preliminary recommendations amend the County Executive's proposal in the following areas regarding the Blaine Urban Growth Area:

- ◆ Urban Growth Boundary. The Urban Growth Boundary proposed by the Executive was accepted.
- ◆ Transfer of Development Rights. A policy was added to the Comprehensive Plan that would expand the transfer of development rights sending area to more parts of the Drayton Harbor Watershed. This was in response to reductions of parts of the Blaine Urban Growth Area.

## Cherry Point

The Planning Commission's preliminary recommendations amend the County Executive's proposal in the following areas regarding the Cherry Point Urban Growth Area:

- ◆ Urban Growth Boundary. The Urban Growth Boundary proposed by the Executive was accepted.

## Columbia Valley

The Planning Commission's preliminary recommendations amend the County Executive's proposal in the following areas regarding the Columbia Valley Urban Growth Area:

- ◆ Urban Growth Boundary and Reserves. The Urban Growth Boundary proposed by the Executive was amended by including a 80 acre parcel on the west side of the Urban Growth Area which is within the existing Urban Growth Area. A proposed Urban Growth Area Reserve for future employment was not recommended and the area was put back into a Rural land use category.
- ◆ Long Term and Short Term Planning Areas. The existing and proposed long term planning areas were removed from Columbia Valley as it was the only Urban Growth Area in Whatcom County to retain these designations.
- ◆ Capital Facilities. The proposed policy (Chapter 2, Land Use, Policy 2AA-6) to revisit the Columbia Valley Urban Growth Area designation in 2011 if water, sewer and fire protection capital facility plans were not developed was removed.
- ◆ Commercial Zoning. The area proposed for a Town Center in the Draft Foothills Subarea Plan was recommended to be designated General Commercial on the Zoning Map.

## Everson

The Planning Commission's preliminary recommendations amend the County Executive's proposal in the following areas regarding the Everson Urban Growth Area:

- ◆ Urban Growth Boundary and Reserves. The proposed expansion of the Everson Urban Growth Area Boundary to the north into Agricultural lands was not recommended. Proposed Urban Growth Area Reserves were also not recommended and were placed into either Rural or Resource land use designations.

## Ferndale

The Planning Commission's preliminary recommendations amend the County Executive's proposal in the following areas regarding the Ferndale Urban Growth Area:

- ◆ Urban Growth Boundary and Reserves. The Executive's proposal for the Urban Growth Area Boundary for Ferndale was recommended; proposed Urban Growth Area Reserves were not recommended and were placed in a Rural land use designation.

## Lynden

The Planning Commission's preliminary recommendations amend the County Executive's proposal in the following areas regarding the Lynden Urban Growth Area:

- ◆ Urban Growth Boundary and Reserves. The Executive's proposal for expansion of the Urban Growth Area Boundary for Lynden was not recommended for adoption; proposed Urban Growth Area Reserves were also not recommended and were placed in a Resource land use designation.
- ◆ Population Growth Allocation. The recommendation to not expand Lynden's existing Urban Growth Area required a lower population growth allocation to match the capacity of the Urban Growth Area to accommodate growth without additional infill strategies or changes in land use assumptions. The growth allocation recommended for Lynden is 3,465 with a 2029 population of 15,078.

## **Nooksack**

The Planning Commission's preliminary recommendations amend the County Executive's proposal in the following areas regarding the Nooksack Urban Growth Area:

- ◆ Urban Growth Boundary. The Executive's proposal for the Urban Growth Area Boundary for Nooksack was amended by removing the portion of the Sumas River floodplain to the east of the city.

## **Sumas**

The Planning Commission's preliminary recommendations amend the County Executive's proposal in the following areas regarding the Sumas Urban Growth Area:

- ◆ Urban Growth Boundary. The Urban Growth Boundary for Sumas was limited to the existing city limits of Sumas.