Whatcom 2031 Vision Workshops Summary

Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan 2011 Update (Phase 1) ■ Whatcom County ■ October 2008

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ICF Jones & Stokes
an ICF International Company

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Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan 2011 Update (Phase 1)

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October 2008

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This document should be cited as:
ICF Jones & Stokes. 2008. Whatcom 2031 Vision Workshops Summary. Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan 2011 Update (Phase 1). October. (ICF J&S 00710.08.) Olympia, WA. Prepared for Whatcom County.

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Introduction

Whatcom County has initiated the first phase of a multi-year project to update its Comprehensive Plan, as required by the Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA). The update will represent the county's vision for the next twenty years. The GMA has two distinct requirements for Comprehensive Plan review and update:

- RCW 36.70A.130(3) requires the County to review, at least every ten years, its urban growth area or areas, and the densities permitted within. This review will be completed in 2009.
- RCW 36.70A.130(4) requires review and update of the comprehensive plan and development regulations every seven years. Whatcom County will be required to complete another review and update in 2011.

In September 2008, a Public Involvement Plan (PIP) was developed to guide Phase 1 community outreach efforts through December 2008. During that time, the County and partner cities will encourage countywide participation in the development of vision statements, growth forecasts and methods, and other related tasks.

In October 2008, the County conducted the Whatcom 2031 Vision Workshop series. The three interactive meetings represented the first round of community outreach focused on the County's existing vision statement, and countywide issues related to population, community values, natural environment, economy and transportation. Nearly 100 citizens attended the three meetings combined. The results of the workshops together with other public input (e.g. public meetings and a questionnaire) and technical analysis will help guide County efforts in its UGA review through June 2009, such as preparing vision statement amendments and conceptual growth alternatives, as well as the broader Comprehensive Plan Update due in 2011.

Workshop Goals

Whatcom 2031 Vision Workshop goals included:

- Sharing input about the Comprehensive Plan Update process;
- Identifying participants' issues, concerns and questions with respect to community values, natural environment, population, economy, transportation, and the county vision statement; and
- Obtaining feedback about the relevance or revisions necessary to reflect a current county vision.

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Notification

In mid September, a workshop postcard announcement was emailed to community organizations and project stakeholders, who then forwarded the announcement onto their constituents and members. The postcard was also placed in high-traffic community locations: County treasurer's offices, County Planning and Development Services front counter, and County Executive's office. Small cities were given an opportunity to place them in their offices. A news release was distributed to local newspapers on October 2, 2008. Other recent media included articles and workshop announcements in the October 3 and 15, 2008 editions of the Bellingham Herald.

Materials

Participants were asked to sign in upon their arrival, then given a meeting agenda, project fact sheet, key topic questionnaire, and comment card. Maps were displayed at each of the five break-out group stations, depicting critical areas, resource lands, county and city boundaries and Urban Growth Areas (UGAs), transportation networks (including rail lines, bus routes and trails), and the County's current comprehensive plan vision statement

Format

All three workshops followed the same format, with a welcome and introductions, question and answer session, break-out groups, and a final recap of key themes. Whatcom County Planning Director David Stalheim welcomed meeting participants, thanked them for their involvement, and introduced county and consultant project team members. Mr. Stalheim reviewed the requirements for the comprehensive plan update, and summarized how the visioning process and public comments all work together to produce a plan for the anticipated countywide population increase by 2031. Next, ICF Jones & Stokes consultant and meeting facilitator Meg O'Leary explained that the purpose of the workshop series was to gather community feedback on the five key topic areas in order to help the project team develop regional growth alternatives. She reviewed the meeting format and encouraged participants to submit their comments via a comment card, letter or email.

The general question and answer session was followed by break-out group sessions structured around five key topic areas: community values and natural environment; population; economy; transportation; and county vision. Station facilitators asked participants to respond to a set of questions. Each group remained at their station for approximately 15 minutes, and then rotated to the next. Results of the station discussions are found in Appendices A and B. See also Appendix C for workshop materials.

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Other Input

An expanded Key Topic Questionnaire—modeled on the workshop station questions—was also prepared and distributed in October 2008, and a separate report will be prepared with those results.

The second round of region-wide community outreach is anticipated to occur in early 2009 and will focus on conceptual regional growth alternatives.

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Key Public Comment Themes

The purpose of the workshops was to identify participants' issues, concerns and questions with respect to community values, and the countywide natural environment, population, economy, transportation, and vision statement. The workshops were structured to explore perceptions and potential solutions, and obtain feedback about the relevance or revisions necessary to reflect a current county vision for regional growth. The following main themes emerged during the workshop break-out sessions. See Appendix A for detailed workshop comments.

Community Values & Natural Environment

Participants were asked what they value most about Whatcom County and the aspects of the natural environment that concerns them most. The diversity of urban amenities and cultural activities, rural character, and proximity to the natural beauty of the area were mentioned consistently. People choose to live in Whatcom County because of the sense of community involvement, the balance of urban and rural environments, mild climate, air and water quality, and the relatively low cost of living.

Key Points

- Concern about car-oriented, auto dependent culture
- Urban/suburban sprawl and development is harming and destroying natural environment
- Need for preservation of agricultural land and zoning for agriculture
- Concern about maintaining water quality, air quality and safe drinking water
- Concern about preservation of, and public access to, County shorelines and uplands

Population

Citizens participated in three activities related to the population topic:

- Review preliminary 20-year countywide population forecasts and give input on whether the forecasts were too low, about right, or too high.
- Consider urban growth scenarios regarding whether growth should be focused in Bellingham or distributed more to outer cities and towns, as well as other scenarios.

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- Identify locations that are the best and worst places for population growth on a map.

Additional results from questionnaires (under separate cover) will be helpful to compare to workshop results.

Population Forecasts

County and city representatives have preliminarily identified a Whatcom County forecast of 251,490 for the year 2031. This would be 60,490 more people than today, representing a growth rate of 1.2% per year. Participants were asked whether they think this level of growth is too little, about right, or too much. Of the 81 who commented, 10 said "too little", 20 responded "about right", and 51 indicated that the forecasted level of growth is "too much". See also Appendix B for results by meeting and total results.

Urban Growth Scenarios

Citizens were asked their opinions on the following urban growth scenarios:

a. Small cities and small urban areas in Whatcom County become their own economic centers so there would be less of a need to go to Bellingham. More population can locate in these small cities and small urban areas to be near jobs.

b. Bellingham continues to be the primary job and population center in the County, and Bellingham's population grows at a faster rate than the rest of the county.

c. Each community takes a share of future population growth that is similar to their share of existing population.

d. Other: (other alternative ideas generated by citizens)

Results showed that of Options "a" to "c", most preferred Option "a" (23 citizens). Option "b" was the next most preferred (11 citizens). A citizen generated scenario of "Combo a and b / Increasing densities in all the cities with continued growth in Bellingham" also was preferred by the same number of citizens as Option "b". See Table 1 below for full results.

Urban Growth Scenario Results

Which urban growth scenario do you prefer?	Participant responses from all 3 workshops
A: Small cities and small urban areas in Whatcom County become their own economic centers so there would be less of a need to go to Bellingham. More population can locate in these small cities and small urban areas to be near jobs.	23
B: Bellingham continues to be the primary job and population center in the County and Bellingham's population grows at a faster rate than the rest of the county.	11

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Which urban growth scenario do you prefer?	Participant responses from all 3 workshops
C: Each community takes a share of future population growth that is similar to their share of existing population.	4
D: Other scenarios recommended by workshop participants	38 total
Projection comes from communities/let each community decide	4
A & B – Increase density in all the cities with continued growth in Bellingham	11
Infill in Bellingham where infrastructure currently exists	2
Protecting resource lands/growth where infrastructure is in place	5
Self supporting small cities without extending boundaries/Small cities increasing density but not boundaries/All cities increase densities, not expand boundaries	6
Build where land is not resource land	4
Focus on Bellingham and Ferndale	1
Option A minus "small urban areas"	1
Undecided/Abstain	4

Best and Worst Locations for Population Growth

Most participants supported population growth in urban areas—in Bellingham in particular—and also Ferndale, Blaine, and Birch Bay. Most preferred to limit population growth in rural areas, and in particular Lake Whatcom and agricultural areas east of Interstate 5 (I-5). Several participants also recommended limiting growth in Columbia Valley UGA, portions of the Blaine/Birch Bay UGA, and portions of the Bellingham UGA on the east. See Appendix B for the map summary across all workshops.

Key Points

- Select low projection and monitor growth
- Project low and make better choices with density – select low population projection to achieve vision
- Preserve agricultural resource lands and rural areas
- Factor natural features, community values, resource constraints, housing speculation in population projections
- Fill in vacant land and buildings in the cities before expanding UGA
- Consider that Whatcom will attract people because of natural environment

Economy

Participants responded to questions about the best and worst places for job growth and the types of jobs the County needs most.

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In terms of the best and worst places for job growth, Participants generally supported added employment in urban areas. In particular, areas identified for greater employment included the current cities/UGAs associated with Bellingham and Ferndale. Other areas also identified for growth include some areas of Blaine, Birch Bay, Cherry Point UGA and areas south of the UGA, and Lynden. Areas where participants indicated a desire to limit employment growth included rural areas in general, and in particular, Point Roberts and Bellingham Bay. In UGAs there were some participants who wanted to limit growth in the Columbia Valley, Drayton Harbor/Birch Bay, and the western and eastern Bellingham UGA in part. There were conflicting ideas of limiting or adding employment in the western Bellingham UGA, while in terms of population there was more agreement to add population there.

Regarding types of jobs, most agreed about the need for living wage jobs near residential areas. Many mentioned the need to support a diversity of industries and economic drivers, such as agriculture, manufacturing, hi-tech, local universities and colleges, and research and development. Additional results from questionnaires (under separate cover) will be helpful to compare to workshop results.

Key Points

- Create and maintain living wage jobs near homes
- Focus on quantity of jobs, not just a number
- Connectivity and transportation are key (jobs near transportation corridors, urban and residential areas)
- Walkable, residential development near employment
- Establish and support jobs that preserve natural resources, environment (sustainable, green collar jobs like tidal, hydro, wind)
- Balance of natural resource jobs (manufacturing, research and development)
- Knowledge-based, hi-tech and manufacturing jobs
- Tourism as an industry (attraction of the natural environment as an economic development tool)
- Balance economic growth with available land
- Establish clear boundaries between agriculture, urban, and critical areas

Transportation

Most participants expressed an interest in improving public transit services and promoting alternative modes of transportation (rideshare, car pools, bicycling, walking) in denser urban areas. They support improved connectivity between communities, including rural and underserved areas. Many noted climate change and

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the importance of creating more infrastructure that supports non-motorized transit. Many mentioned the need for better integration between transportation and land use planning, for example, locating jobs near residential centers in order to decrease auto dependence.

Key Points

- Locate jobs near residential areas, decrease need to travel
- Plan higher density corridors that can be served by transit efficiently
- Improve connections between systems and between communities
- Improve public transit on I-5 corridor and feeder lines to communities
- Emphasize bike and pedestrian facilities, especially in urban areas
- Maintain roads between communities
- Plan for less fossil fuels (support non-motorized transit)
- Plan for transportation and population at the same time

Vision Statement

Participants were asked what they like and dislike most about the current vision statement, and whether or not they agree with the rural areas description. Many agreed that the statement adequately captures the community vision, though many felt the language is too vague and in need of clarification. Others noted the lack of implementation, enforcement or measurement of the vision.

Key Points

- Implementation and enforcement strategy is needed. Current codes do not reflect the vision.
    - Missing strategy to implement vision.
    - Need broad guidelines, implemented in a specific way.
    - Pretty good vision – but not enforced.
- Translate the vision into something you can measure and evaluate.
- Vision is too long. Keep it simple:
    - Whatcom County is beautiful; keep it that way
- Good 20th Century vision statement. Set gold standard for 21st Center for rest of nation.
- Language is too vague. Clarify what the terms low density, urban, rural, local control, open space, etc. mean in this context.

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- Rural sentences are all relative – no specifics – too vague. Need something measurable, objective.
- What does "low density" mean? Does that mean 1 du/5 acres? That doesn't fit vision. Five acres is the worst thing in zoning. Need a lot size reflecting agriculture. Need sustainable agriculture.
- Urban Areas-vague. Have had sprawl. Need to follow through.
- What does "local land use control" mean?
    - E.g. rural residents don't want cities to tell them what they should do.
    - E.g. Nooksack happy with small town.
    - Cities want sense of community. E.g. neighborhoods in Bellingham.

- Clarify what is meant by incentives and have a balance of regulations and incentives
    - Best way to get what we want. Tax authority gets folks to go with community values.
    - Land use incentives – we don't have money. If serious we need regulations, downzones. Can't only be through incentives.

- Rural includes agriculture and mining which is not "quiet".
- Need right to have places for heavy and light industry
- Agricultural land should be preserved and protected. Also forestry.
- Environmental constraints and carrying capacity – address it. Water is limiting factor.
- Want high density in Bellingham; more density in urban better to retain rural and natural areas. Need well structured, high density model area. Make it comfortable.
- Like "distinct" boundary, want same statement for urban/urban each maintains identity.
- Instead of "distinct boundary" say "hard line boundary"

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Appendix A: Vision Workshop Comments

Workshop 1: Bloedel Donovan Park

Location: Bloedel Donovan Park – Bellingham, WA
Date: October 15, 2008
Time: 6:00 to 8:00 pm
Meeting Participants: at least 30

Question & Answer Session

At least 30 people participated in the first workshop (30 signed in, but more people arrived once the meeting started). Based on the sign-in sheets, participants represented the following areas: Bellingham (18); Bellingham/Ferndale (1); Birch Bay (1); Blaine/Ferndale (1); Edgemoore (1); Ferndale (1); Lake Samish (1); Point Roberts (1); Sudden Valley (1); Van Wyck (1); Wahl Road (1); Whatcom Falls (1); and one from an another Whatcom County location that was difficult to decipher. The following is a summary of the question and answer session.

Q: Are we promoting growth with a huge population number?

A: The process is just beginning and it is a local decision. The State Office of Financial Management (OFM) projections provide a range. There is a number, but also there are land area decisions.

Q: How many local decisions are based on value choices?

A: Local choices are many—population, employment, land use, infill strategies, market factor, single family, multifamily, mixed use, etc. This is not just a County responsibility. Cities plan for their own communities.

Q: Seattle has increased density without expanding city limits. Can Bellingham and Ferndale do the same? There are vacant buildings.

A: The process includes both population and UGA boundaries. It is the County's intent to protect resource lands and rural character. The County has discretion, but needs to consult with cities.

Q: How can the County save agricultural land if they expand UGAs every seven years?

A: There are many strategies to set UGA boundaries. Bellingham and Ferndale UGAs do abut.

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Q: Can the County revisit the population projection? Can we go lower, below the OFM projection?

A: The OFM appeal period has passed. However, OFM provides a range from low to high.

Q: If a growth projection has been selected, what is the purpose of this meeting?

A: No decision has been made on the number at the County level. The County has had discussions with cities. The preliminary projection is a number to discuss.

Q: Are we breaking down into watersheds? Do you want active research involved? E.g. Lake Whatcom, Birch Bay.

A: Where growth should occur is part of the discussion.

Q: County doesn't have precision. Some estimates are possible. What is the cost of the High, Medium, and Low (projections)?

A: The process includes looking at capital facility and service plans for growth.

Workshop Station Comments

Station 1: Community Values & Natural Environment

What do you value most about Whatcom County? Why?

Community

- Engaged cities and non-profits
- Population of people who want to get it right – willing to work towards growing well
- Community-minded people who care
- Not crowded yet
- No 30-somethings, no jobs
- Local produce, farmers market
- Heritage, community values, culture, good folks
- Run industry out of town for recreational use of industrial property

Economy

- Potential for self sufficiency (clean air, water, good industry, potential for food production. Everything you need.)
- Affordable housing, lower cost of living
- Potential to bring it together

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Education & Cultural Opportunities

- Educational system, higher education

Landscape & Natural Environment

- Diversity of landscapes/cityscapes, urban/rural, distinct (hiking in morning/symphony in evening)
- Mountains, natural wonders, parks, rural nature
- Balance or urban/rural, nature/cities
- Location, iconic setting between two big cities
- Close to big cities, but not a big city itself
- Climate, mild, temperate
- Need for preservation of agricultural land, diversified livestock/farming practices
- Save land for parks
- Wolverines
- Viable salmon runs
- Relationship to the environment
- Respect needed for current zoning

Outdoor Recreation

- Diversity of outdoor activities, recreation

What aspects of our County's natural environment are you most concerned about?

Development

- Influence of building industry and pro-development groups
- Giving developers their way
- Speculative housing
- "McMansions" on five-acre lots

Economy

- Sustainable system of public finance
- Taxpayers subsidizing new development
- Fair impact fees for new development
- Influence of big industry

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Land Use and Urban Sprawl

- Car-oriented, auto dependent culture
- Urban/suburban sprawl and development that harms and destroys natural environment
- Possible loss of what makes Whatcom County great – could this happen? When is it enough? No more!
- Conflict between industrial and agricultural use impacting fisheries
- Vacant space in urban areas while UGA expands
- Preservation of agricultural land and zoning for agriculture
- Concern for wildlife habitat, loss of species diversity and protection of critical areas with growth projection being considered
- Zoning conflicts with values
- Zoning codes/laws that are predictable
- Conflicting approaches
- Existing 1 unit per five-acre zoning conflicts with rural character preservation
- Planning priorities – who has the say?
- Taxpayer subsidizes new development
- Fair impact fees for new development
- Incentives to cut timber for schools

Shoreline Management

- Shorelines and upland development that enhances existing conditions and environment
- Lack of public shoreline access
- Private ownership of tidelands

Water and Air Quality

- Orca, sound, bay
- Plan needed for water quality and quantity
- Pollution from British Columbia
- Water quality and quantity
- Drinking water quality
- Air quality

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Station 2: Population

Where are the best places for population growth? Where are the worst places?

- See Appendix B for composite workshop maps.

County and city representatives have preliminarily identified a Whatcom County forecast of 251,490 for the year 2031. This would be 60,490 more people than today, representing a growth rate of 1.2% per year. Do you think this level of growth is too little, about right, or too much?

Results

- Too little: 1
- About right: 3
- Too much: 17

Comments

- Projection should be lower given the current national economic downturn
- GMA's timeline is an issue – pick low population projection and monitor growth
- Choose low number to achieve vision
- Project low and make better choices with density
- Extrapolate population from longer period
- Break down population projection by city, subarea, etc.
- Use bottom-up projections
- Factor natural features, community values, resource constraints, housing speculation in population projections
- Consider demographic shift and migration to Whatcom County
- Consider impacts of higher gas prices: shorter trips, fewer trips to Bellingham
- Invalid projection
- Consider margin of error
- County tax payers should decide [how much or how little growth] we want to see

Which urban growth scenario do you prefer?

Results

- See Appendix B for results.

Comments

- How is growth going to impact resource lands?

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- Need for good transit
- Need for density along I-5 corridor
- Preserve agriculture
- Communities should analyze how we resolve “not in my backyard” population growth
- What if no one wants to grow?

Station 3: Economy

Where is the best place for job growth? Where is the worst place?

Results

- See Appendix B for composite workshop maps.

What type of job growth is needed in the County (e.g., commercial, office, manufacturing, high tech/research, tourism, farming, forestry, mining, home-based businesses)?

Job Types

- Living wage jobs near homes
- Focus on quality of jobs, not just the number
- Knowledge-based, manufacturing jobs, research and development
- Port of Bellingham will bring in good jobs (wages, stability)
- Tourism as an industry – attraction of the natural environment as an economic development tool
- Jobs should go to current residents rather than new residents
- Center for business innovation – look at opportunities, build forecasts on opportunities
- Discourage land speculation and non-production jobs like realty
- Should not try to micro-manage business development

Land Use

- Balance economic growth with available land
- Jobs near transportation corridors, in urban areas
- Walkable, residential development near employment
- Connectivity and transportation are key
- Keep jobs in towns, near homes

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- Home-based businesses in smaller towns
- Great opportunity for telecommuting (employers don't need to move here)
- Opportunity to capitalize on WWU and Canada and attract talent
- Small business incubators to encourage local business development
- Local goods and services for residents
- Zone areas for smaller scale development to encourage small business, not sprawl
- Vacant industrial land with infrastructure
- Compact urban centers, increased density in cities, maintain buffers
- Clear boundaries between agriculture, urban, critical areas
- Don't want to have comments interpreted as encouragement of growth
- Bellingham as central dense city, with smaller scale compact development in smaller cities
- Not in favor of Port residential development
- Keep Bellingham as heart
- Sprawl started with mall

Natural Resources, Environment

- Jobs that preserve natural resources, environment (sustainable, green collar jobs like tidal, hydro, wind)
- Balance of natural resource jobs – manufacturing, research and development (focused in Bellingham)
- Location dependent on natural and built environment capacity/constraints (transportation, water, endangered species, Salmonid stock)
- Job growth should be relevant to underlying resources – tourism protects character/natural environment)
- Concern about Bellingham growth without stable water supply

Population Growth

- Grow jobs in parallel to housing – population drives employment
- Population and jobs should work in parallel – agriculture is the exception
- Consider needs of retired population

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Station 4: Transportation

What transportation system elements do you think need the most improvement (e.g., bicycle paths/routes, pedestrian trails/sidewalks, public transit, new roadway connections, increased roadway capacity, roadway maintenance, freight movement, commuter trains)?

Funding & Fees

- Interlocal agreements and impact fees – large scale planning; between cities and city planning
- Need impact fees to maintain roadways
- Lobby legislature – allow impact fees for alternative transportation

Infrastructure & Services

- Coordinate transportation needs with tribes
- Carpools, park and ride, rideshare
- No public transit to outlying areas
- Commuter trains, electric railway
- Public voucher for taxi cabs – service rural areas
- Support multiple modes of transportation across communities
- Cut WTA service with Ferndale
- Reduce road widths on local streets (reduce impervious surface)
- Simplification of stormwater facilities
- Rain gardens can be added to greenway (WWU example)
- Freeway onramps
- Limit impervious surfaces
- Connect dead end roads
- Ferry terminal Squalicum, airport, trolley (connections/tourism/relieve traffic)
- Keep LOS (level of service) at current level; do not lower LOS
- Include pubic input: WA commerce corridor; LOS is decreasing; support multiple modes of transportation; TIP funding; make it a priority in Bellingham first, then countywide

Land Use

- Maintain what we have – plan for future, plan right-of-way widths
- Public transit on I-5 on high demand corridor – feeder lines to communities; preserve open space

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- Plan connections between systems and between communities – service residential areas
- Tradeoffs of creating better connectivity between communities – bedroom communities
- Plan transportation prior to development – development should observe limitations
- Connections to services from waterfront
- Locate jobs near residential, decrease need to travel
- Plan for less fossil fuels (plan for bike, pedestrian, non automotive)
- Plan for transportation and population at the same time
- Encourage public transit where density is located
- Within community emphasize bike/pedestrian, transit, capacity; maintain roads between communities
- Plan for growth in North County – efficient connections between rural cities
- Climate action plans – include them in planning
- Keep tribes in contact, coordinate transportation needs with tribes
- Airport/flight corridors planning – plan for population growth
- Annexations need master plan for transportation

Studies

- Study rapid transit vs. rapid transit/taxi
- North/South corridor bus system study – existing route is at full capacity, Canada and south)

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Station 5: Vision

Whatcom County is revising its Comprehensive Plan vision statement for a new planning horizon year of 2031. The County's current vision, directed to year 2022, is as follows:

> *Whatcom County is a place where urban growth is concentrated in urban areas, where there is a distinct boundary between urban and rural uses, where agricultural use is encouraged, where resource lands and water resources are protected, and where land use changes are brought about through incentive programs. Rural areas are peaceful and quiet with less traffic and congestion than in urban areas. There is low-density development with open spaces allowing for privacy. A sense of community is retained and local control is exercised in land use decisions.*

What do you like most about the current vision statement? What do you dislike about the current vision statement? Do you agree with the description of rural areas in the vision statement? What are we missing in the vision statement?

Agriculture

- Rural areas may change: county can't afford infrastructure; need to support farms and maintain right to farm; average distance of food travel is 1,500 miles, that will be reduced; reduction in road size; and need for mass transit.
- Encourage agricultural use without fossil fuels.
- Need pocket agricultural protection. Urban specialty farming ("Joes" 5 acres in Fairhaven is an example)
- Avoid breaking up agricultural land
- Can have five-acre zoning if there are no prime soils

Employment

- Lynden doesn't have enough jobs.
- Birch Bay doesn't have enough jobs.
- Blain and Sumas have a good balance of jobs.
- Business parks reduce quality of life
- Bellingham needs heavy industry – more Cherry Point ideas for industry

Enforcement & Measurement

- Concern that vision has been ignored to date
- Missing strategy to implement vision
- Translate vision into something you can measure
- Codes don't reflect vision

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- Vision statement lacks enforcement (County decision makers need to follow it)
- If County was following vision, Bellingham/Ferndale UGAs would not be adjacent
- Zoning changes contradict vision
- Local control had been ignored and not enforced (each community should decide)
- Rural residents don't want cities to tell them what they should do
- Cities want sense of community
- County is responsible to create a place that's livable.
- Reflect what is in law (in vision) and move on to regulations

Housing

- Reconsider living arrangements in rural areas, e.g., multifamily. Understand that it differs from conditions in the city.

Land Use

- Need space for heavy and light industry
- Need houses near jobs, improves transportation
- Need to encourage self sufficiency in food production
- Consider examples where cities/towns have bought open space in ring around city
- Five acres is the worst zoning element. Need a lot size that reflects agriculture. Need sustainable agriculture.
- Prefer clustering
- Down-zone some five-acre lots or buy development t rights or transfer to cities. Incentives and regulations.
- Topography and U.S./Canadian border offer unique opportunities.
- Fringe areas should be in urban areas. Need transition from rural to urban fringe (CTED guidance).
- Need sustainable forestry
- Draw line: fill fast or slow; lock in the line; right to say "full"

Transportation

- Reduce size of roads
- Need mass transit

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Vision Statement Language

- Vision is too long. Keep it simple:
  - Whatcom County is beautiful – keep it that way.
  - Issue – boundaries. Need to protect agricultural lands.
- Careful about re-opening vision statement. Don't argue about wordsmithing. Like it as is.
- Good 20th Century vision statement. Set gold standard for 21st Center for rest of nation.
- Vision not bold enough
- 70 to 75% unhappy about how we're growing
- Not sure of meaning of "peaceful/character"
- What does low density mean? Does that mean 1 unit per 5 acres? That doesn't fit vision.
- What does "local land use control" mean?
- Add language: "Compact dynamic" cities with transportation choices. Complementary vision County and cities.
- Add language" "Where sustainable agriculture is encouraged"
- Add language: "protect quality of life"
- Second line: instead of "distinct boundary" say "hard line boundary"
- Rural includes agriculture and mining which is not "quiet".
- Rural includes resource lands and critical areas. GMA is clear on densities.
- Change language: Resource lands need to have right for agriculture to continue.
- Change language: Rural sentences are all relative – no specifics – too vague. Need something measurable, objective.
- Change urban areas language: hard line urban boundary
- Change language: Third line, where agricultural and forestry use is encouraged, preserved and protected.
- Clarify what low density means: rural
- Clarify what open space means: urban

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Workshop 2: Bellingham Public Library

Location: Bellingham Public Library – Bellingham, WA
Date: October 16, 2008
Time: 9:00 to 11:00 am
Meeting Participants: at least 49

Question & Answer Session

At least 49 people participated in the first workshop (49 signed in, but more people filed in once the meeting started). Based on the sign-in sheets, participants represented the following areas: Bellingham (41); Ferndale (2); Lake Samish (1); Lummi Island (2); Lynden (1); Maple Falls/Foothills (1); Mount Vernon (1). The following is a summary of the question and answer session.

Q: Need more notification and more opportunity for public input. The County should have directly mailed the notice and questionnaire.

A: The County emailed notice, provided news releases, and has a web site. County has also prepared a questionnaire – available on the County Web site and handed out at the workshops. More public meetings and hearings are planned. All participants who signed in will be notified of future meetings.

Q: How much weight does public input have? Flawed process where speculators and businesses run process. Don't trust government.

A: We value the public process. In addition to the public input, technical information is being provided to elected officials. All information provided to officials is available at the County website.

Q: How much attention is paid to global and national population growth? What kind of context is there for this process?

A: Technical information such as population and employment projections are on the County Web site. The information does not include much about national / global concerns. There is data on births, deaths, and migration.

Q: Economic issues are important. The market is changing, how is this factored in?

A: The consultant has indicated the future is not known. The Growth Management Coordinating Council (GMCC) has recommended a lower growth rate due to uncertainty.

Q: Are there other ways to give input?

A: Questionnaire, letters, emails. See the Public Comment section on the County web site. The GMCC and staff are reviewing them.

Draft

Q: Futurewise is recommending lower growth. Are there enough details, estimates and reliability?

A: The ECONorthwest study was based on estimates. Every year OFM prepares annual estimates based on births, deaths and building permits. OFM extrapolates the information, and some information may not be completely accurate. Estimates are based on real data but are estimates.

Q: If always getting a new population number and accommodating it – how can we protect rural areas?

A: The County can make choices on the population number, and can recognize carrying capacity.

Q: Over the past 20 years, the County grew 2.36% annually, but the GMCC selected a lower growth rate (in half). What did the GMCC use to select the number?

A: The GMCC reviewed data including OFM age and migration data, and regional trends. The GMCC number is similar to the estimated most likely forecast; the GMCC selection is a difference (lower) of 5,000.

Q: Look at carrying capacity of county as defined by values.

A: Under the GMA requirements are to assure growth can be supported by services, roads, water, etc. Also, the County will have to comply with SEPA. This is challenging with the time line.

Q: Can we plan ahead for the next round?

A: The County and cities can set some strategies for further discussion after June 2009.

Workshop Station Comments

Station 1: Community Values & Natural Environment

What do you value most about Whatcom County? Why?

Business & Services

- Farmers market, public market
- Local family farms, local food and crafts available
- Small businesses, number and variety
- Vibrant downtown in spite of malls
- Local business philosophy
- Great social services

Draft

Culture & Recreation

- Political climate and difference of opinions
- Ahead of sustainability curve, active groups with campaigns for “buy local”
- Green living awareness, attitude
- Community awareness, neighbors, organizations
- Non-profits working to save things we value
- Educated population
- University, higher education
- Bike culture and bike accessibility
- Close to the Cascades – recreation opportunities, hiking, etc.
- Green trail systems
- Chuckanut Drive
- Authenticity of town, reflects history of people
- Industrial heritage – rural culture

Economy

- Limited economic opportunities, human scale commercial environment
- Agriculture resource element of economy
- Stable economy, shelters from swings

Land Use

- Small town, rural quality, single-family height homes, high sense of community
- Location between metro cities, close to large cities
- Agricultural land local farms, potential for food production
- Separated towns, not sprawled
- Urban/rural balance
- Distinct urban areas
- Low density, lack of sprawl in places
- Not over populated yet
- Agricultural land, resource land
- Relatively good traffic, compared to big cities
- Historic buildings

Draft

Natural Environment & Climate

- Open space rural, forested areas, wildlife, streams, lakes
- Views of water
- Vistas, San Juan, Mountains, Mt. Baker
- Home to all five salmon, native
- Mountain to sea connections
- Raspberries, largest in country
- Quality of air/water
- Moderate climate
- Quiet

What aspects of our County's natural environment are you most concerned about?

Development

- Waterfront development
- Phased development to get past EIS requirements

Land Use

- Preventing sprawl, specific residential zoning (five-acre sprawl)
- Threats agricultural resource land
- Planning for people instead of planning for parks, preservation
- Population should be determined by where we want to go instead of by where we've been
- UGA size around city, need to be bigger to protect rural/agricultural lands, affordable housing
- Intrusion of housing into rural and agricultural areas
- Land value going up
- Need for infill
- Affordable housing
- View sheds, green hillside, need for design standards
- Light pollution, night views, distresses birds
- Intrusion of housing into rural and agriculture areas
- Chuckanut Ridge preservation

Draft

- Urban area residents resist to infill, need for density
- Nooksack, rural runoff, development
- Overuse of recreational resources
- Off-road vehicle use while recreating
- Open space / green space within city (e.g., Lake Cornwall Park)
- Parks, more parks per person
- Gentrification

Natural Resources & Environment

- Preservation of wetland, creeks
- Preservation of forests
- Preservation of wilderness, biodiversity, wildlife corridors and habitat connectivity
- Grizzlies
- Balancing values, and human/wildlife needs
- Protecting Lake Whatcom
- Quality of resources, clean air, water preserve ecosystem
- Cut down forests, need for intact forest ecosystems, mature forests
- Eel grass beds
- Place for kids to stay here
- Bellingham Bay dredging/mercury
- Trees (mature) in new developments
- Water quality – recreational uses and overuses
- Lake Padden turning into Green Lake
- Marina on waterfront, boat impact, could grow food for our population in bay – i.e. crab, oyster, clams

Water & Air Quality

- Water rights for farming
- Clean air and water enforcement
- Drinking water, float planes and boats on Lake Whatcom
- Use of pesticides/herbicides in the watershed
- Environmental impacts of development on water quality

Draft

- Clean sound and estuaries

Station 2: Population

Where are the best places for population growth? Where are the worst places?

- See Appendix B for composite workshop maps.

County and city representatives have preliminarily identified a Whatcom County forecast of 251,490 for the year 2031. This would be 60,490 more people than today, representing a growth rate of 1.2% per year. Do you think this level of growth is too little, about right, or too much?

Results

- Too little: 6
- About right: 16
- Too much: 26

Comments

- Job creation. Where will the population work?
- Whatcom will attract because of natural environment
- What are the cities' desires or plans for growth?
- Commitment to preserving agricultural land
- Issues elsewhere may impact Whatcom County's desirability
- May be unforeseen issues if too small a number is used
- Lower population growth rate is better. Too much growth costs too much.
- Taxpayers take on the burden
- Residential development does not pay for itself
- We will get what we plan for
- Building rural is not affordable housing
- Plan for greater growth
- Larger projections equals larger UGA
- Look at increased density
- World population growth should be considered
- Preserving agricultural land
- Reserve flexibility

Draft

Which urban growth scenario do you prefer?

Results

- See Appendix B for results.

Comments

- Maintain distinction between Bellingham and rural character
- Should be transportation based decision
- Denser urban areas
- Small towns – keep rural character
- No expansion into agricultural lands
- Self determination by communities
- Population projection influences tax money
- We are track with medium projection
- Bellingham has been heavily marketed

Station 3: Economy

Where is the best place for job growth? Where is the worst place?

Results

- See Appendix B for composite workshop maps.

What type of job growth is needed in the County (e.g., commercial, office, manufacturing, high tech/research, tourism, farming, forestry, mining, home-based businesses)?

Economy

- Balance large retail office growth with small local business
- Not an economy for tall buildings yet
- Capitalize on Pacific Rim location – new Whatcom development, NOAA
- Free trade zones
- Attract living wage jobs
- Employment to allow for diverse population – family wage
- Self sustainability within county
- Emphasis on new job growth for current residents
- Lynden – trying to maintain bedroom community status

Draft

- Blaine/ Birch Bay—likely to grow with retirees
- Protect Bellingham from becoming just a tourist destination
- WWU expansion
- Do not import things that can be produced locally – support local economy
- Support local businesses, diversity of local businesses
- Small scale industry – maintain local control
- Local businesses give back to local community
- Don't want large new businesses employing new residents, need home grown economy
- Large employers are terrific for the community, they support small businesses
- Bellingham not desirable for industrial
- More jobs that produce things, rather than middle men
- Support salmon stock, recreate viable salmon industry
- Use recycled and by-products for new production
- Tie into qualities that we appreciate – agricultural production, ecotourism
- Incentives/ subsidies – do not support businesses that are counter to goals

Job Types

- Continue diversification and clean industry
- Sustainable, green jobs, green economy – agriculture, wind and solar energy, teachers, green building (LEED)
- Ecotourism – jobs that preserve the environment
- Hi-tech growth, clean technology, clean electricity, low cost
- NOAA type jobs
- Allow telecommuting
- Cottage industries – work from home rather than commuting
- Creative companies – research and development, think tanks
- Jobs that keep college graduates in town
- Unsure manufacturing activities – use resources in Whatcom County
- More small agriculture, value added, local jobs – processing plants

Land Use

- Larger businesses and in incorporated cities

Draft

- Increased density, height as trade off for sprawl – go up, not out
- Protect unincorporated UGAs for as long as possible
- Densities in cities – CBDs
- Center growth around transportation corridors – I-5, airport, Bellingham, G Meridian
- Rural growth – should be within constraints of natural environment and services Whatcom watershed
- 100,000 acres active agricultural land needed to support related industries – contiguous parcels

Natural Resources & Environment

- Clean up bay, grow food, process oysters, clams, crabs, fish (salmon) – feedback system to support environmental industries
- Protect natural resources, locate away from primary water flows
- If maintaining local manufacturing, control environmental impacts
- Focus on Bellingham water quality

Station 4: Transportation

What transportation system elements do you think need the most improvement (e.g., bicycle paths/routes, pedestrian trails/sidewalks, public transit, new roadway connections, increased roadway capacity, roadway maintenance, freight movement, commuter trains)?

Funding

- More investment in public transit buses
- Greenways funding for bike paths
- Revenue sharing by zip code and direct transportation funds to where people live
- Establish transportation related impact fees

Land Use

- Prioritize bike/pedestrians: build walk able communities, locate services, employment, residential density / mixed use
- Plan communities with services close to residents and employment, reduce need to drive
- Separated bike trails to and between towns
- Smaller scale trails - cheaper, fewer impacts
- Public transit are better in dense areas

Draft

- Develop residential areas around services
- Consider wildlife corridors in transportation planning
- Do not expand airport
- Prioritize public transit with alternative fuels, decrease pollution
- Connections between major connectors in Bellingham arterials
- Limit / no development on roads with low Level of Service
- Protect single family and historic neighborhoods
- Street widths relative to function big roads are regional connectors, road way widths
- Transportation (public) between southern counties
- Do not widen streets increase alternative transportation, zippy busses, don't build for cars
- New development and redevelopment needs bike/pedestrian amenities
- Use other countries as examples (Europe)

Services

- Increase commuter trains between counties
- Public transit connectivity on I-5 Corridor
- Light rail between Bellingham and Seattle airport
- "Buy parking" by developers, TDR, various options, ongoing / annual fees
- Utilize school busses as transit
- Freight – trains are more useful, relief on roads
- More accessibility to alternative fuel
- Increase bike parking
- Roundabouts are useful, reduce congestion
- Rail, hybrid busses
- Fewer signals
- Reward carpooling, punish or charge privilege to drive
- Community education on trip reduction / planning

Draft

Station 5: Vision

Whatcom County is revising its Comprehensive Plan vision statement for a new planning horizon year of 2031. The County's current vision, directed to year 2022, is as follows:

> *Whatcom County is a place where urban growth is concentrated in urban areas, where there is a distinct boundary between urban and rural uses, where agricultural use is encouraged, where resource lands and water resources are protected, and where land use changes are brought about through incentive programs. Rural areas are peaceful and quiet with less traffic and congestion than in urban areas. There is low-density development with open spaces allowing for privacy. A sense of community is retained and local control is exercised in land use decisions.*

What do you like most about the current vision statement? What do you dislike about the current vision statement? Do you agree with the description of rural areas in the vision statement? What are we missing in the vision statement?

Agriculture

- Rural lands are not just peace and quiet
- Need to protect agriculture
- Want determination of how much agricultural land is needed – use to help size UGAs; sustain look; food policy council; support other regions
- Need land in reserve native bee colonies; 1/4 acre will kill nesting sites
- Produce food for our people
- Support local organic
- Minimum acres 100,000 – have 108,000
- Farmers will retire. Purchase of development rights?
- Rural areas – peaceful and quiet – but also agricultural production not just Sunset magazine. Need an economically vital agriculture engine. Congestion – what about tractors. What about highways, mining? Reality of rural.

Enforcement & Measurement

- Consider the "State of the Vision Statement" evaluation every two years
- Pretty good vision – but not enforced
- Like statement. It's about accountability.
- Urban Areas – vague. Have had sprawl. Need to follow through.

Land Use

- Add idea of carrying capacity. What land can support.

Draft

- Contradiction? Low density that may not protect rural. Clear up. Avoid Mc Mansions.
- Five-acre lots not productive; down zoning appropriate; may not be politically feasible.
- Don't like development incentives.
- There's need for peace and quiet and nature. Human nature to desire.
- Want high density in Bellingham; more density in urban better to retain rural and natural areas. Need well structured, high density model area. Make it comfortable.
- Seems like it promotes five-acre zoning – do not want it
- Want Bellingham to be small city, parts of city maybe could have more density. Don't encourage people to come.
- Need strong distinction between urban and rural
- Fundamental flaw in tax structure taxed at highest and best use. Difficult to keep in native state. Hard to get open space programs.
- Intention is good – but can by-pass restriction (open space can be defined in many ways)
- Disagree. Incentives are tools to bring in targeted groups, like type of economic growth.
- Water, sewer, but also forestry, agriculture. How much is needed? Base on value system
- Need economic incentives, but concerned with incentives can be misused (height limits)
- 10-year tax credit needed to gentrify downtown
- Missing Parks and Recreation – expand Park opportunities. Lost out on grant funding.
- Regional funding strategies; economic and community EDA, CEDS

Natural Environment

- Address environmental constraints and carrying capacity. Water is limiting factor.
- Good vision but doesn't address water resources – not adequate, hasn't happened
- Need to mention environment in addition to privacy
- Need something about land use not just incentives. How considered? Not just enforced. Say something about land use in urban and rural areas.

Draft

Vision Statement Language

- What does local control mean? Vague. Needs to mean County makes decision not neighborhoods, equitable approach.
- If there is too much local control, we may miss regional issues. Whatcom and Skagit are connected.
- Don't put money first, need food and necessities. Vision for "we" not "me".
- Urban growth vague; urban growth should be well-planned coordinate with transportation; community gathering
- Like statement about rural areas. Is peaceful and quiet with less congestion. Add rural growth no impact to environment. Don't plunk development there. Affects transportation.
- Like the vision statement, except low density with open space. Don't put people near agriculture with the smells.
- Like "distinct" boundary, want same statement for urban/urban each maintains identity.
- Change – LUA's [land use applications] are steered through community input.
- Take out "quiet" – peaceful works
- Need fewer words
- After word "density" add sustainable development
- What does low density mean?
- What do incentives mean?
- Divide into two paragraphs/sections
- Keep peace and quiet not privacy
- Take out "urban" in first line. Keep "growth"
- Define ultimate city limits
- Doesn't talk about type of jobs, i.e., job diversity

Draft

Workshop 3: Lynden Community Center

Location: Lynden Community Center – Lynden, WA
Date: October 16, 2008
Time: 6:00 to 8:00 pm
Meeting Participants: at least 19

Question & Answer Session

At least 19 people participated in the first workshop (19 signed in, but a few more people joined the meeting late). Based on the sign-in sheets, participants represented the following areas: Bellingham (1); Birch Bay (5); Blaine (1); Custer (4); Ferndale (2); Lake Samish (1); Lynden (4); and Whatcom County (1). The following is a summary of the question and answer session.

Q: State population projection – has it been selected? If yes, then violating public hearing.

A: OFM has developed forecast. Medium is most likely. County hasn't selected number yet. Hired a consultant to assist. The GMCC has made a recommendation, but each jurisdiction is taking back to their community. GMCC recommendation is similar to "most likely." Need to look at locations/ how growth is accommodated.

Q: Who is on the GMCC?

A: Each city and county has an elected official serving.

Q: Input element—do these numbers (at meeting) seem representative?

A: The County is trying different methods to notify and gain input: meetings, comment cards, questionnaire. GMCC meetings are also open to public. Staff finds public input influential.

Q: Encourage staff to come to Birch Bay steering committee.

A: County staff have attended some.

Q: Went to visioning in1990s. Different forms of sprawl in different countries. England- along rail, Italy- apartments in outskirts, China- taking over neighborhoods. Need to look at what it costs to serve people in an efficient way. If done right, it can protect agriculture.

A: Thank you for input.

Q: Once you have population numbers, how do you get to the Urban Growth Area?

Draft

A: The County will look at land supply and demand and community dialogue. The County will have a compressed time frame. We are collecting information on lots and growth, e.g., rural. Please see www.co.whatcom.us/pds/2031 for information collected to date.

Q: When did county receive order?

A: The County knew since June 2008 about the Hearing Board order. A consultant has been on board since August.

Q: How important is this meeting?

A: It is important to bring questions, and some may require more time. Think it's good.

Workshop Station Comments

Station 1: Community Values, Natural Environment & County Vision

What do you value most about Whatcom County? Why?

- Farmers; admire tenure/length of time as part of community, collaborative spirit
- Agricultural production, dairy farms
- Rural, small town atmosphere
- Natural environment, marine areas, mountains
- Proximity to outdoor recreation activities
- Diverse cultural activities
- University and colleges
- Proximity to Seattle and Vancouver
- Contained urban development

What aspects of our County's natural environment are you most concerned about?

Land Use

- Five-acre lots around Lynden
- Deliver services at a reasonable cost – keep development compact
- Blaine/Birch Bay UGAs are too dense
- Concern with clearing forest and stump pulling (context – peninsula near Birch Bay)
- Farmland protection

Draft

- Control sprawl, more defined rural break
- Balance personal property rights with environmental protection
- Concern with inefficient/excessive energy consumption (smaller, compact development is more effective)

Natural Environment

- Eelgrass destruction; loss of aquatic habitat; oysters, salmon
- Damage to fish/shellfish industry

Water & Air Quality

- Protecting marine estuaries – Birch Bay, Drayton Harbor
- Septic systems – County is testing for sandy soils and prohibiting septic systems in these areas, yet they have found no contamination
- Water quality and shoreline environment
- Pesticide usage and health issues
- Water pollution from stormwater and farm animals
- Contamination of drinking water

Whatcom County is revising its Comprehensive Plan vision statement for a new planning horizon year of 2031. The County's current vision, directed to year 2022, is as follows:

> *Whatcom County is a place where urban growth is concentrated in urban areas, where there is a distinct boundary between urban and rural uses, where agricultural use is encouraged, where resource lands and water resources are protected, and where land use changes are brought about through incentive programs. Rural areas are peaceful and quiet with less traffic and congestion than in urban areas. There is low-density development with open spaces allowing for privacy. A sense of community is retained and local control is exercised in land use decisions.*

What do you like most about the current vision statement? What do you dislike about the current vision statement? Do you agree with the description of rural areas in the vision statement? What are we missing in the vision statement?

Economy

- Clean growth, green technology

Enforcement & Measurement

- Vision is not being implemented, nor are comprehensive plan goals and policies
- County executive should be held accountable for implementation of statement

Draft

- County has little say in sense of community – urban development guides

Land Use

- UGAs too large (peninsula near Birch Bay)
- More flexibility in zoning regulations, more comprehensive view versus privacy for a few
- Concern about five-acre lots – limited supply of residences for young families
- How is clustered development handled, versus spread out lots?
- Will UGAs increase?
- Provide lifestyle choice in the city that residents want, so they don't move to Whatcom County. Not enough single family residential housing in city.
- How does the County control growth/land use? Comprehensive land use, zoning, population allocations.
- How does Birch Bay steering committee interact with Whatcom County? Birch Bay committee creates plan, meets with County – County is the ultimate authority until Birch Bay incorporates.

Vision Statement Language

- Strike "sense of community…" sentence; use State laws instead.
- It doesn't apply; it's not accurate; urban growth is not concentrated; whole statement is inaccurate.
- Too development oriented
- Indicates rural should be peaceful/quiet; should privacy for some be the ultimate goal?
- What are incentive programs?
- What is the purpose of the vision statement?
- Vision should include County should provide best services at a reasonable cost; concentrate resources
- Clarify local control – does that mean city jurisdiction? Unclear.
- Ensure community concerns are addressed
- Clarify low-density. Where is low-density development? Against GMA goal if low-density is in urban area.

Draft

- Overall sounds like a good vision
- Urban concentration statement does not seem accurate – contradicts County history

Station 2: Population

Where are the best places for population growth? Where are the worst places?

- See Appendix B for composite workshop maps.

County and city representatives have preliminarily identified a Whatcom County forecast of 251,490 for the year 2031. This would be 60,490 more people than today, representing a growth rate of 1.2% per year. Do you think this level of growth is too little, about right, or too much?

Results

- Too little: 3
- About right: 1
- Too much: 8

Comments

- Bellingham is a retirement destination
- Population growth rate will continue
- Projection is too low and will impact infrastructure
- OFM tracking has been accurate
- Inadequate planning for schools if population projection is too low
- Rural areas are more costly to serve
- Rural transportation is inefficient
- Jobs in the County revolved around the building industry
- Not enough drinkable water
- No roads, not enough tax money to serve the area
- Vacant land within cities
- No sewer
- Look at lands within city before expanding

Which urban growth scenario do you prefer?

Results

- See Appendix B for results.

Draft

Comments

- Maintain open space
- Cities have more self determination in what attracts their community
- See local communities become independent
- Bellingham hardly has services
- Avoid building on critical area and resource lands

Station 3: Economy & Transportation

Where is the best place for job growth? Where is the worst place?

Results

- See Appendix B for composite workshop maps.

What type of job growth is needed in the County (e.g., commercial, office, manufacturing, high tech/research, tourism, farming, forestry, mining, home-based businesses)?

- Logging
- Light, wood products and value-added manufacturing
- Exports to Canada
- Import/export due to location on coast
- Opportunities with upcoming Olympics in British Columbia
- Green jobs – alternate energy, wind, tidal
- Dairy industries unique to Whatcom County. Regulations are hurting and not supporting dairy here.
- Agriculture, truck farming – local produce
- Diversity of jobs and wages
- Family wage jobs—health care benefits, supporting housing costs
- Professional, hi-tech
- WWU is economic booster – research and development
- Production of cellulose based fuels
- Assure water needs for industry
- Telecommuting
- Health care
- Tourism

Draft

What transportation system elements do you think need the most improvement (e.g., bicycle paths/routes, pedestrian trails/sidewalks, public transit, new roadway connections, increased roadway capacity, roadway maintenance, freight movement, commuter trains)?

Infrastructure & Services

- Safe bike and pedestrian pathways
- Elevated train
- Maintenance of roadways, increased capacity between communities
- Public transit connectivity between communities and areas not served by buses
- Get people off freeway, short rides, commuter trains
- Use existing structures for commuters
- Public transit critical for elderly people and walking communities
- Tax payer subsidized taxi vouchers
- I-5 corridor freight movement, more efficient, safe

Land Use

- Due to fuel costs, need for change, increased localization, decentralization. Options for pedestrian travel over car travel.
- Urban villages, self-contained communities

Draft

Questionnaire Summary

WHATCOM 2031 ▪ Comprehensive Plan Update ▪ February 11, 2009

Introduction

The questionnaire is one of the approaches to public participation in the multi-faceted Whatcom 2031 Public Involvement Program. This method of data collection is not scientific as a survey would be, rather it served as another way to gather quantitative and qualitative information from people who were less likely to attend the vision workshops or submit written comments.

The results contained in this document and its appendices are all of the responses received from 387 respondents to the questionnaire. The questionnaire was posted on the website on Oct. 10, 2008 and was removed from the website on Nov. 14, 2008. Printed versions of the questionnaire were delivered to the Foothills area in response to a request from a few residents and copies were also distributed at the Vision Workshops on Oct. 15 and 16.

This "questionnaire summary" will examine some of the multiple choice responses, with a full report in Appendix 1, and will not summarize the responses from open-ended questions. Some participants in Whatcom 2031 have expressed discomfort with their comments being summarized for review by decision-makers. The verbatim responses to these questions are located in Appendix 2 of this document.

Demographics

Respondents to this questionnaire came from across the county and rates of response from each of the cities were comparable to their portion of the county population. More than 50 percent of respondents have lived in Whatcom County 20 years or more and were 45-64 years old.

Community Values

The natural environment ranked high among those items in the community values section of the questionnaire. "Natural environment features," "clean water and air," and "parks, trails, open spaces, and recreational opportunities" topped the list. Community character and rural character were the next most important values.

Population Growth

Respondents were given an opportunity to comment on the Growth Management Coordinating Council's recommended county-wide population growth projection of 251,490 or 60,490 more people by 2031. The verbatim text of the responses to the question and whether they thought the growth was too little, about right, or too much are in Appendix 2. While 38 percent of the respondents indicated that the projection was "too much", 31.6 percent thought the projection was "about right" and 19.0 percent thought the projection was "too little." Respondents were also asked if population growth in the rural areas was too little, just right, or too much. The majority of respondents (62.2 percent) thought that growth in the rural areas was "too much."

Participants in the questionnaire were also asked where the best and worst places were for population growth. The top five best places were (in order): Bellingham, Ferndale, Blaine, Lynden and Birch Bay. The top five worst places were (in order): Rural Areas, Columbia Valley/Kendall, Nooksack, Birch Bay, and Everson and Sumas (tied). While some places, according to respondents, seem clearly better suited or not suited for growth, Birch Bay appears on both the best and worst list.

Finally, participants were asked to look into the future and predict what type of housing they intend to occupy in 20 years. More than half (59.7 percent) of respondents indicated they intend to live in a single-family home. The next most preferred housing type were condominiums (16.9 percent).

Economy

When asked about the types of industries they would like to see in Whatcom County, respondents indicated that high technology/research and development, light manufacturing, farming, cottage/home-based business, and tourism (in order) were the highest priority. They also identified Bellingham, Ferndale, Lynden, Blaine, and Cherry Point as the best places for economic growth. Rural areas, Columbia Valley/Kendall, Nooksack, Sumas, and Everson were identified as the worst places for economic growth.

Natural Environment

The questionnaire asked respondents what aspects of the natural environment they were most concerned about. The top five issues were (in order): Rivers, streams, and lakes; water quality; air quality; wildlife habitat; and marine waters and bays.

Transportation

The question about transportation was broken into two types of transportation: within communities and between communities. Within communities, high priority transportation types were: bicycle paths or routes; pedestrian paths, trails, or sidewalks; and public transit. Between communities, public transit was the only high priority.

Respondents were also given an opportunity to express comments about the Whatcom County transportation system and the verbatim responses to those comments are in Appendix 2.

County Vision

This section of the questionnaire was entirely open-ended and verbatim responses to the questions about the vision statement are located in Appendix 2, starting on page 24. Responses to each of these questions were wildly varied. It is clear that the respondents to the question love Whatcom County as it is and/or they want to make it better. Many ideas were given on how to improve the vision statement and the entire comprehensive planning process. These responses have been reviewed by county planning staff and consultants for the Whatcom 2031 comprehensive plan update process and will be reviewed by decisions makers. They will be used, along with public comment and the results of workshops to prepare a revised vision statement and to guide decisions throughout the process.

Conclusion

While public comment and participation for the Whatcom 2031 process is on-going, the questionnaire portion of the process is now complete. The results of this questionnaire will also supplement and be supplemented by the results of a questionnaire from a parallel process for the update to the rural element. Again, the results of the questionnaire are only one part of a larger public participation process that will continue into 2011. They will not be given any more or less weight than other public comment in other forms. They are a piece of information that will help guide decision makers as they adopt regulations, goals and policies in this comprehensive plan update process.

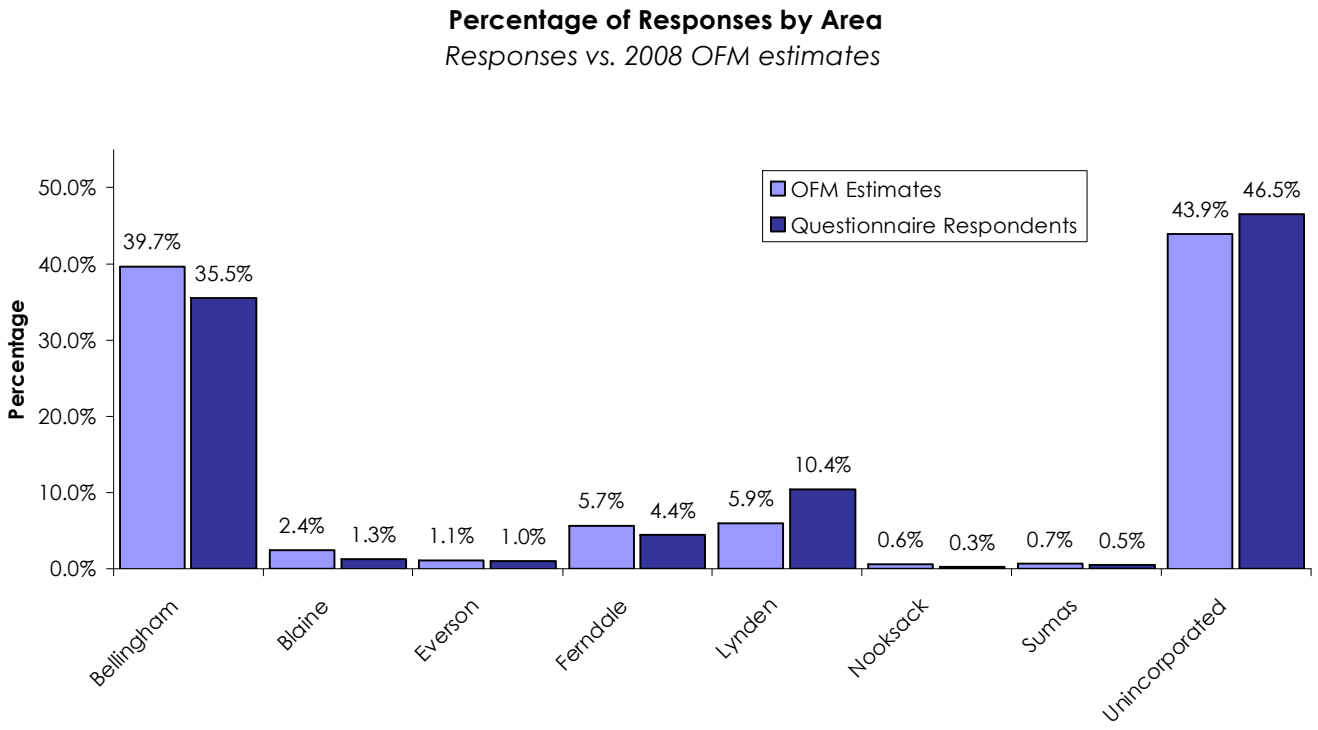
For Appendix 2 to this document, please see "Whatcom 2031: Final Questionnaire Results" on our website at www.whatcomcounty.us/pds/2031

Questionnaire Summary – Appendix 1

WHATCOM 2031 ▪ Comprehensive Plan Update ▪ December 2008

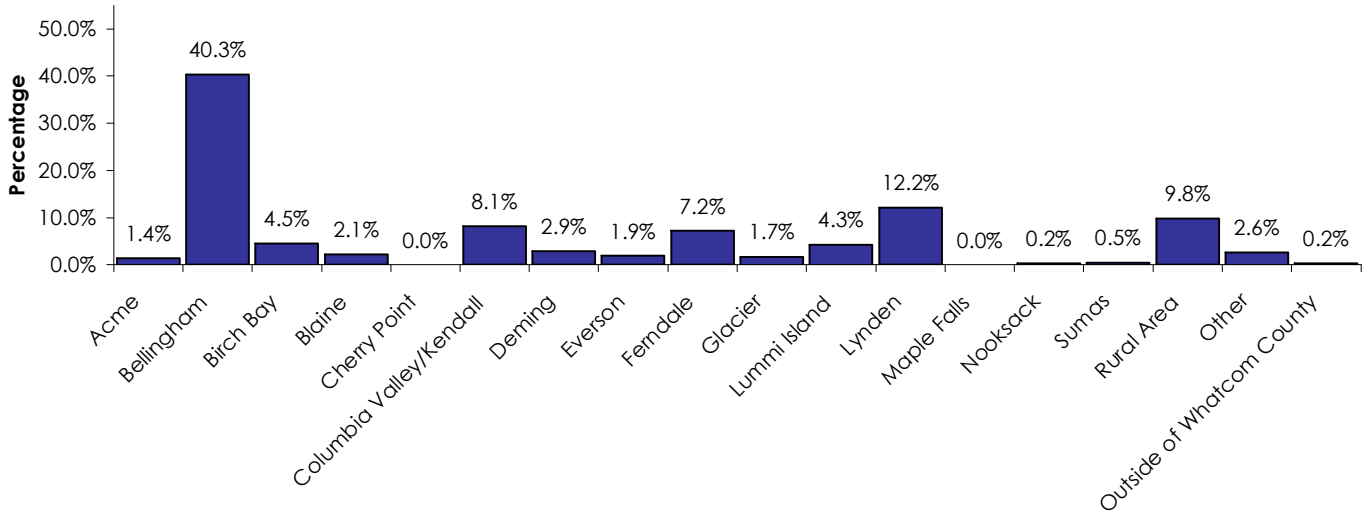
Demographics

Which area do you live in or are you closest to (please check one)?

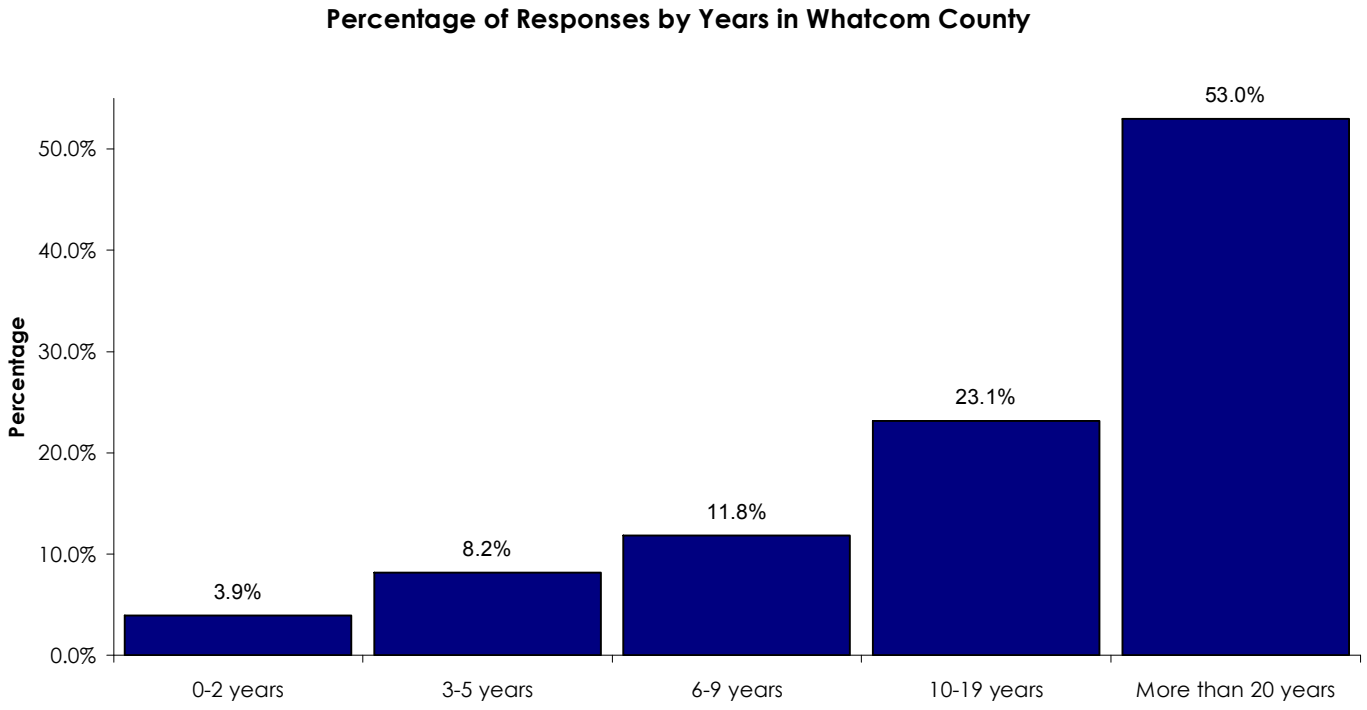


Percentage of Responses by Area

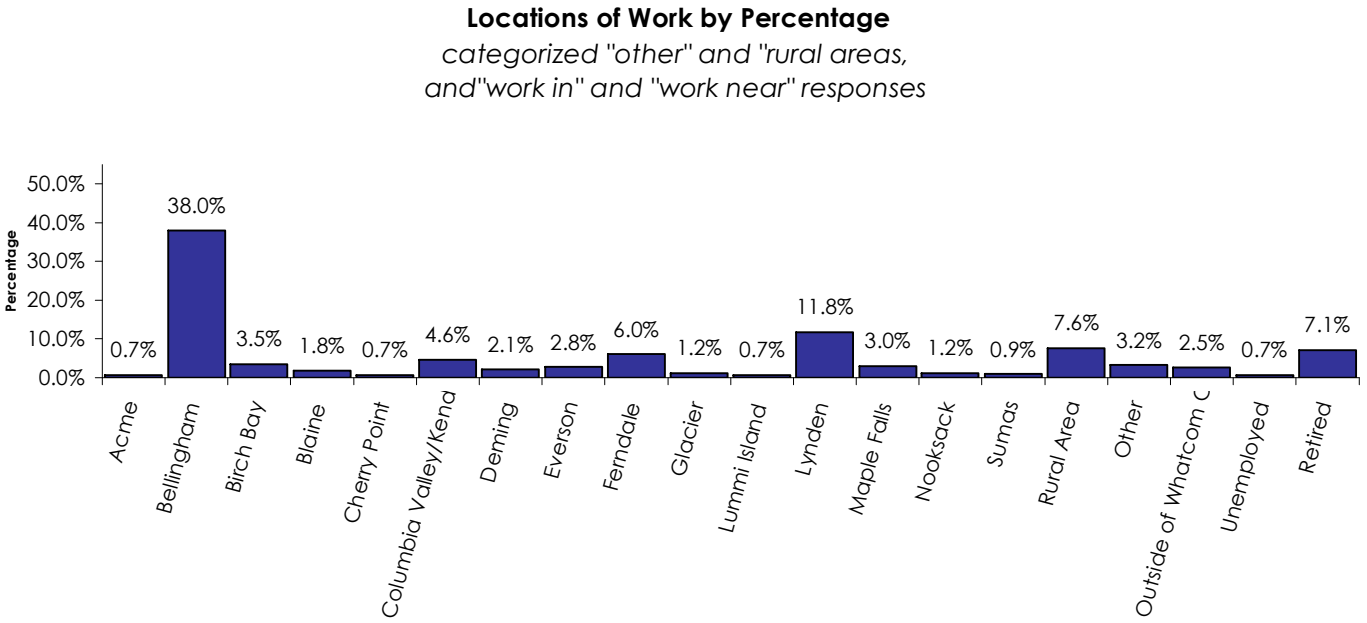
both "live in" and "live near" responses
including expanded and categorized
"other" and "rural" repsonses



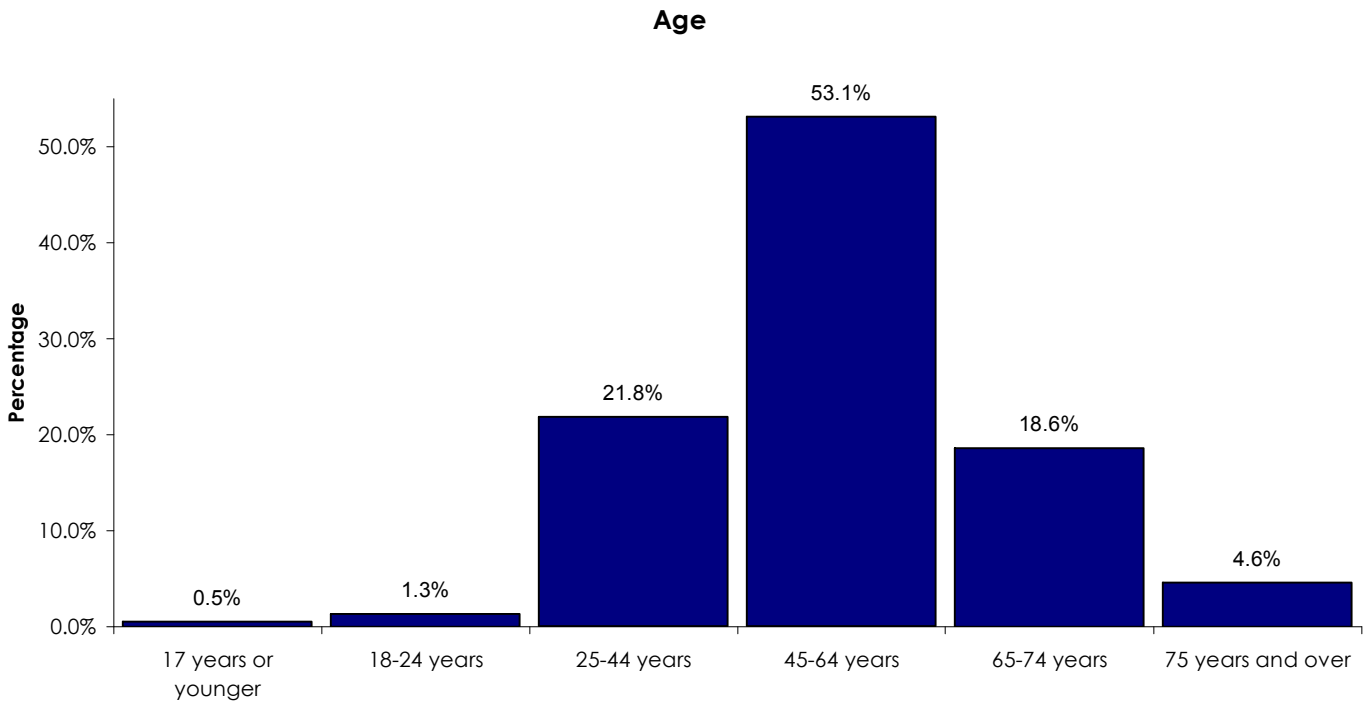
How long have you lived in Whatcom County (please check one)?



Which area do you work in or are you closest to (please check one)?



How old are you (please check one)?



Community Values

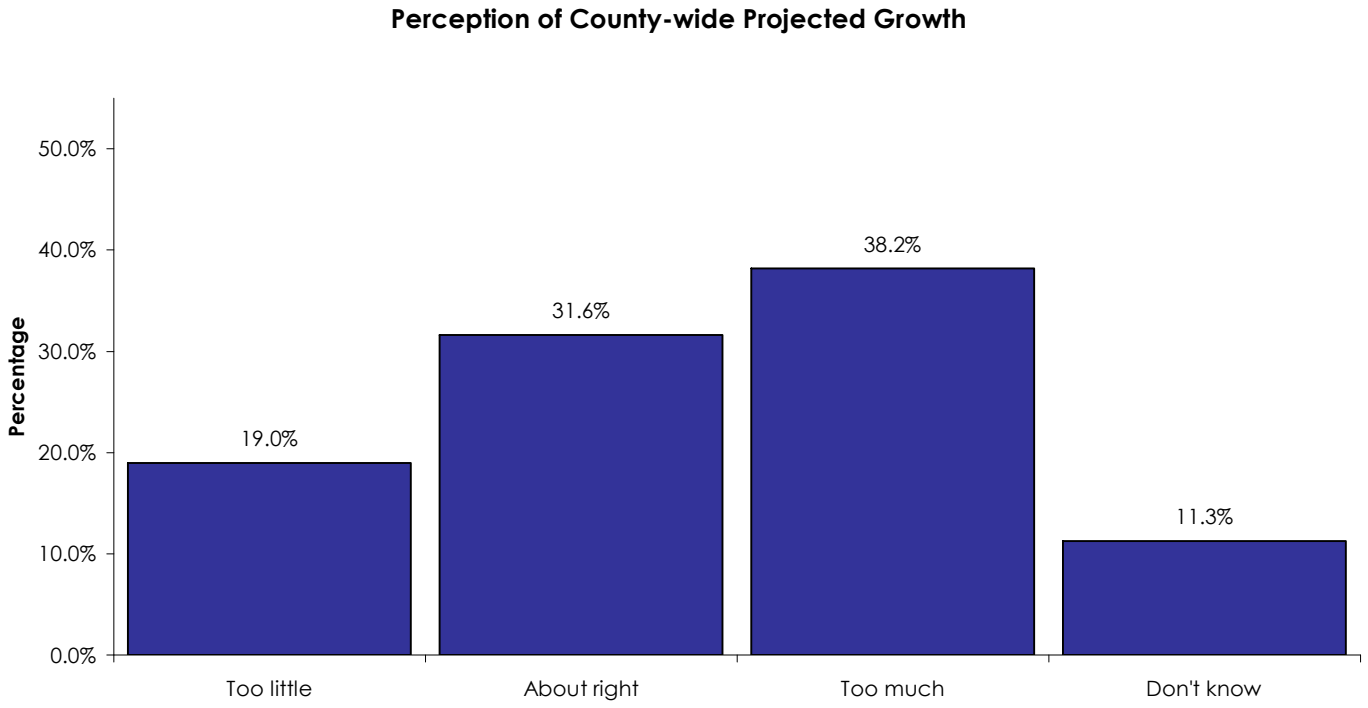
What do you value most about Whatcom County? Please check the five most important features to you.

1. Natural environment features
2. Clean water and air
2. Parks, trails, open spaces, and recreational opportunities
4. Community character
5. Rural character
6. Forest lands
7. Agricultural activities
8. Educational opportunities
9. Availability of jobs
10. A variety of housing choices and prices
11. Transportation system
12. Healthcare services
13. Cultural activities
14. Commercial/shopping opportunities
15. Public safety services
16. Other*

*See Appendix 2 for verbatim responses.

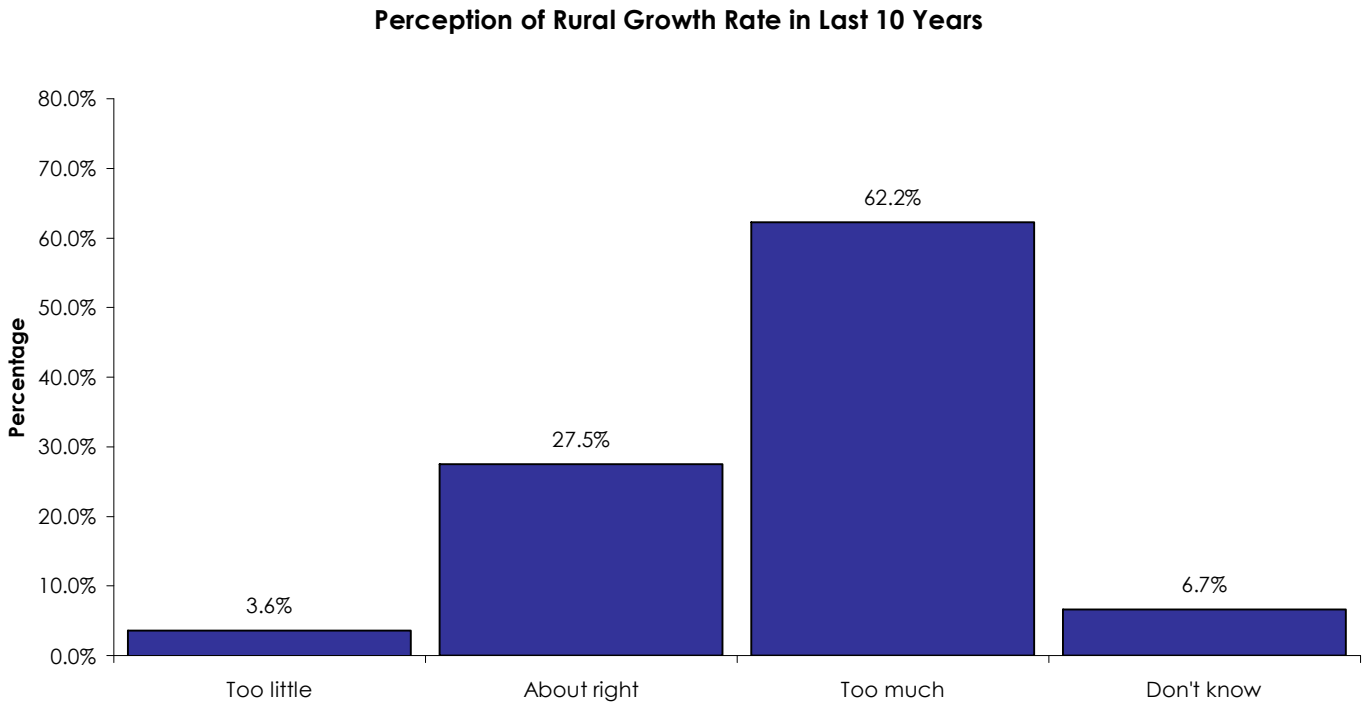
Population Growth

County and city representatives have preliminarily identified a Whatcom County forecast of 251,490 for the year 2031. This would be 60,490 more people than today, representing a growth rate of 1.2% per year. Do you think this level of growth is (please check one):

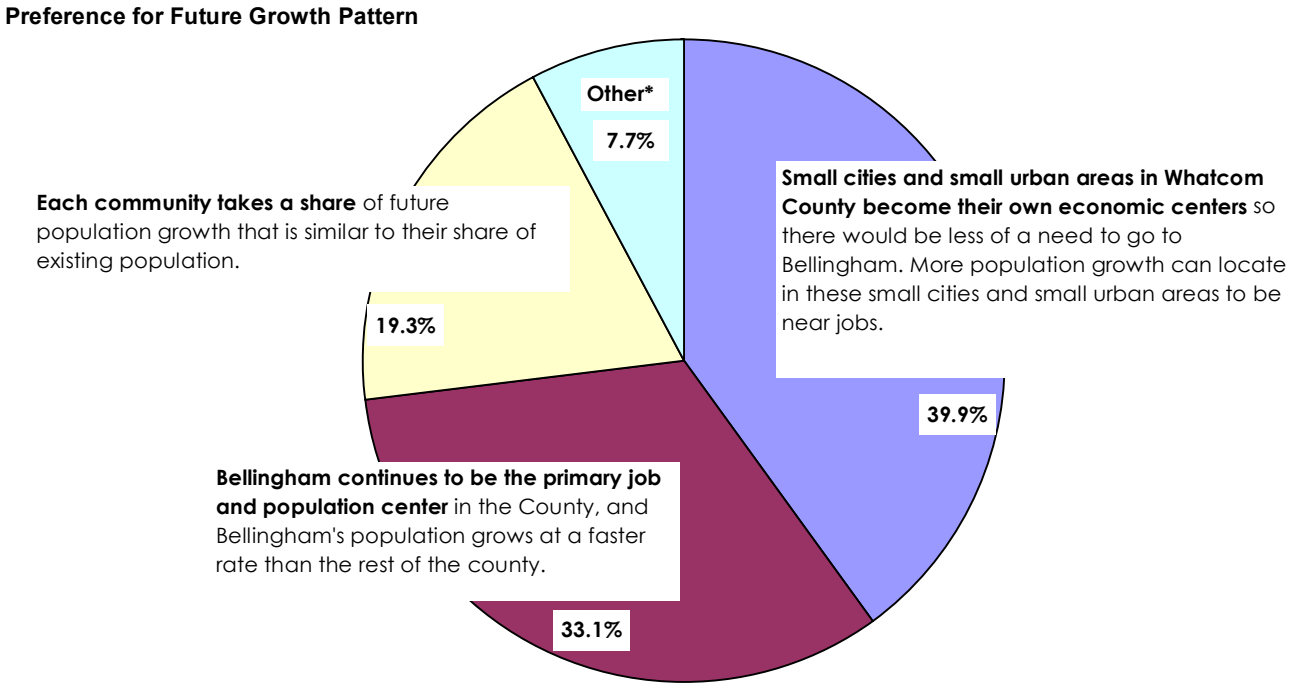


See Appendix 2 for "Why" responses.

In rural areas would you say that population growth in the last 10 years has been (please check one):



Which urban growth scenario do you prefer (please check one)?



*See Appendix 2 for verbatim responses.

Where are the <u>best</u> places for population growth (please check all that apply)?

1. Bellingham
2. Ferndale
3. Blaine
4. Lynden
5. Birch Bay
6. Sumas
7. Everson
8. Nooksack
9. Columbia Valley/Kendall
10. Other*
11. Rural Areas

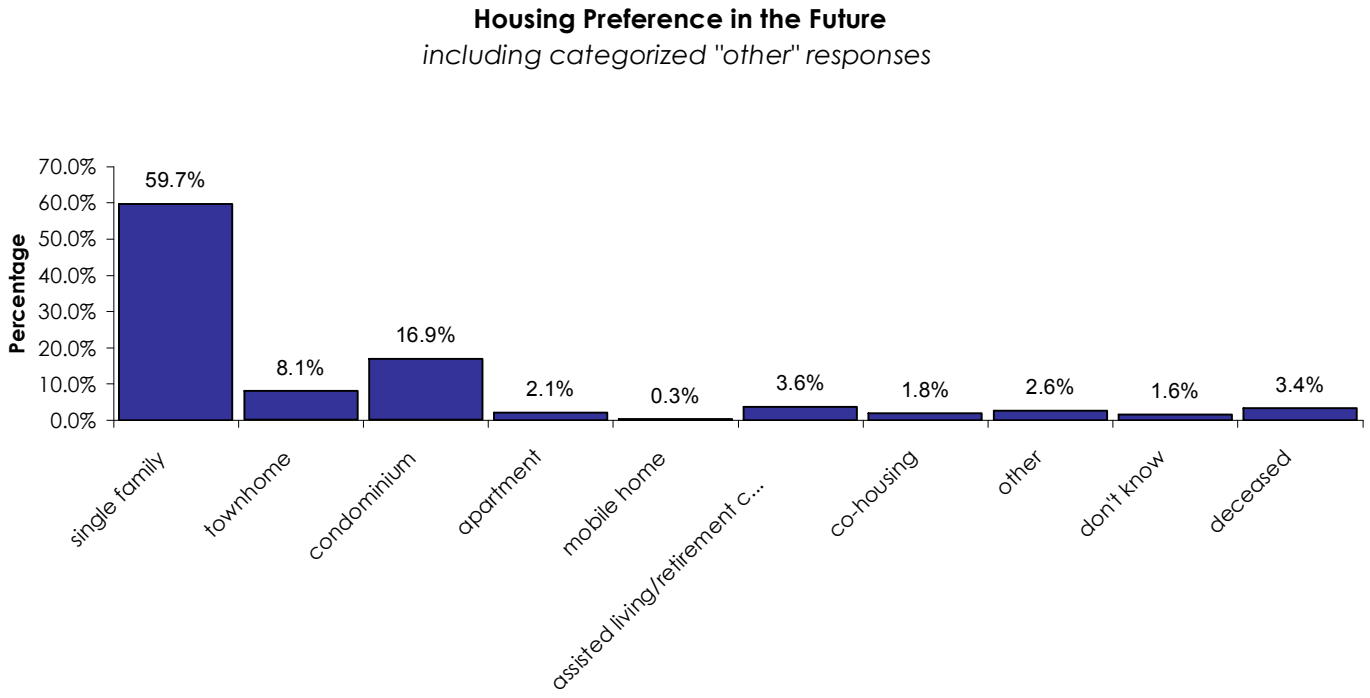
*See Appendix 2 for verbatim responses.

Where are the <u>worst</u> places for population growth (please check all that apply)?

1. Rural Areas
2. Columbia Valley/Kendall
3. Nooksack
4. Birch Bay
5. Everson
5. Sumas
6. Bellingham
7. Lynden
8. Other*
9. Blaine
10. Ferndale

*See Appendix 2 for verbatim responses.

In 20 years, in what type of housing do you see yourself living (please check one)?



Economy

The Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan Update will need to be consistent with GMA goals to promote economic opportunity for all citizens. Most employment growth is likely to occur in cities and urban areas where services are available, but some employment growth is also expected in rural areas consistent with rural character and setting.

What type of job growth is needed in Whatcom County? (please check three that are most important to you)

1. High Technology/Research and Development
2. Light Manufacturing
3. Farming
4. Cottage/Home-Based Business
5. Tourism
6. Heavy Manufacturing
7. Retail/Commercial
8. Office
9. Forestry
10. Other *
11. Mining

*See Appendix 2 for verbatim responses.

Where are the <u>best</u> places for job growth (please check all that apply)?

1. Bellingham
2. Ferndale
3. Lynden
4. Blaine
5. Cherry Point
6. Sumas
7. Everson
8. Birch Bay
9. Nooksack
10. Columbia Valley/Kendall
11. Other*
12. Rural Areas

*See Appendix 2 for verbatim responses.

Where are the <u>worst</u> places for job growth (please check all that apply)?

1. Rural Areas
2. Columbia Valley/Kendall
3. Nooksack
4. Sumas
5. Everson
6. Birch Bay
7. Other*
8. Cherry Point
9. Lynden
10. Bellingham
11. Blaine
12. Ferndale

*See Appendix 2 for verbatim responses.

Natural Environment

Whatcom County offers a beautiful and ecologically diverse natural environment that is to be protected in both urban and rural areas of the county.

What aspects of our County's natural environment are you most concerned about? Please pick the five most important features to you.

1. Rivers, streams, lakes
2. Water quality
3. Air quality
4. Wildlife habitat
5. Marine waters and bays
6. Ground water/ aquifers
7. Forest lands
8. Rural landscapes
9. Fish habitat
10. Scenic vistas
11. Wetlands
12. Flood hazard areas
13. Other *
14. Landslide hazard areas

*See Appendix 2 for verbatim responses.

Transportation

Please prioritize the following elements of the transportation system based on what you think needs the most improvement within your community and between communities.

	High Priority	High-Medium Priority	Medium Priority	Medium-Low Priority	Low Priority
Within Communities	• Bicycle paths or routes • Pedestrian paths, trails, or sidewalks • Public transit		• Roadway maintenance	• Freight movement	• Roadway connections (new) • Increased roadway capacity • Commuter trains
Between Communities	• Public transit	• Bicycle paths or routes	• Freight movement • Commuter trains • Roadway maintenance		• Pedestrian paths, trails, or sidewalks • Roadway connections (new) • Increased roadway capacity

See Appendix 2 for verbatim "Other" responses.