



Scoping Document

WHATCOM 2031 ■ Comprehensive Plan Update ■ January 2009

Whatcom County 10-Year Urban Growth Area Review Environmental Impact Statement

In accordance with State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) and Whatcom County environmental review procedures (WCC Chapter 16.08), this scoping document is prepared for the 10-year urban growth area (UGA) Review. The purpose of this document is to present issues to be addressed in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) prepared for the UGA Review.

The Whatcom County Department of Planning and Development Services, as lead agency for the action under consideration, is seeking agency, affected tribes, and public comment on the proposed scope of the EIS.

The *Determination of Significance and Scoping Notice* issued by the Department of Planning and Development Services on January 28, 2009 should be read in conjunction with this scoping document.

The Scoping Notice is available on the Whatcom County website,

<http://www.co.whatcom.wa.us/pds/2031/index.jsp>, or by contacting the contact person below.

What is the proposal?

Whatcom County has initiated a multi-year project to update its Comprehensive Plan by 2011, 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 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 was required to complete this review in 2004 and will be required to complete another review and update in 2011.

The current proposal that is the subject of this scoping document involves the 10-year UGA review. As part of the UGA review, the County will consider: growth forecasts and allocations, urban growth area boundaries, and the future land use map including land uses patterns. As a result of the UGA review, the County may consider amendments to countywide planning policies, county comprehensive plan goals, policies, maps, and development regulations such as zoning. It is anticipated that the 2009 UGA Review will lay the foundation for the 2011 Comprehensive Plan Update.

What is an environmental impact statement?

An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is a report prepared by or on behalf of a lead agency, in this case Whatcom County, in accordance with the SEPA Rules. The EIS will identify and describe:

- the proposed action (e.g. UGA review and associated amendments) and alternatives;
- existing conditions of the built and natural environment;
- impacts that may occur if the proposed action or an alternative action were implemented;
- mitigation measures to reduce or eliminate impacts; and
- impacts found to be significant, unavoidable, and adverse (meaning residual impacts despite mitigation measures).

Once the range of alternatives and elements of the environment to be addressed in the EIS are determined through scoping (see below), a Draft EIS will be prepared and issued for agency and public comment. The Draft EIS comment period will be 30 days. A Final EIS will be prepared after the comment period. The Final EIS will respond to comments.

What is scoping?

Scoping is a process intended to ensure that the EIS focuses on and addresses relevant issues, and is required through the SEPA Rules (WAC 197-11). The County is required to notify agencies, tribes, and the public when an EIS is under preparation and to solicit comments on the range of alternatives and impacts to be discussed in an EIS. The Determination of Significance and Scoping Notice for the 10-year UGA review identifies the elements of the environment to be addressed in the EIS, which are also summarized below. Because an EIS is required to analyze significant environmental impacts only, scoping is intended to identify and narrow the EIS to the significant issues.

What topics will the EIS study?

Whatcom County has identified the following areas for discussion in the EIS: earth, air quality, water resources, plants and animals, land and shoreline use, plans and policies, population and employment, cultural resources, transportation, and public services and utilities.

A comparative evaluation of alternative courses of action (e.g. alternative urban and rural land use patterns and urban growth area boundaries) will be included in the EIS. Alternatives are anticipated to include: No Action as required by SEPA – a continuation of the adopted Comprehensive Plan extended to 2031, and two action alternatives. The action alternatives are anticipated to vary the location and type of growth in the County to accommodate projected growth to the year 2031. Public meetings are scheduled to ask for public comment on potential alternatives and study areas to be considered. (See below.)

How do I comment on the EIS?

The public is invited to comment during two stages: during the Scoping period for the EIS (going on now), and during the 30-day comment period on the Draft EIS after it is published (estimated in spring 2009). During the EIS comment period, public meetings are anticipated.

Most immediately *during this scoping period*, agencies, affected tribes, and members of the public are invited to comment on the scope of the EIS. You may comment on alternatives, mitigation measures, probable significant adverse impacts, and licenses or other approvals that may be required.

The methods and deadline for giving us your scoping comments are:

- **Written Comments:** Provide written comments to the Lead Agency contact person no later than **5:00 p.m. February 18, 2009**.

- Attend public meetings to provide comments on the range of EIS alternatives scheduled for:
 - **Public Open House** – Tuesday February 17, 2009, noon to 7:00 p.m. held in the Whatcom County Courthouse, 311 Grand Avenue, Bellingham

 - **Joint Hearing** – Whatcom County Planning Commission and County Council, Tuesday February 17, 2009, 7:00 p.m. in the County Council Chambers at the Whatcom County Courthouse, 311 Grand Avenue, Bellingham

Notifications about the Draft EIS publication and public meetings will be made in accordance with adopted County procedures. Interested parties who contact the County with a request to receive notices will also receive notices (see contact information below).

Contact Person:

Matt Aamot, Senior Planner
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Planning & Development Services
5280 Northwest Dr.
Bellingham, WA 98226
Phone: 360-676-6907
Fax: 360-738-2525
PDS@co.whatcom.wa.us

How can I get more information?

The County website – <http://www.co.whatcom.wa.us/pds/2031/index.jsp> – will have updated information. Check it often so you'll know what's happening. Or call for information: 360-676-6907.

Potential Environmentally Significant Issues

The following is a summary of the elements of the environment that have been identified as being potentially impacted by the proposal, and therefore, will be addressed in the EIS. Impacts, mitigation measures, and impacts that cannot be mitigated will be identified in the EIS at a qualitative level of detail appropriate to the general nature of the proposal.

Earth

The Earth analysis will address the topography and soils found in the County, and the areas subject to geologic hazards including erosion, landslides, liquefaction and other hazards. The identification of geologic conditions and hazards will be based upon available sources such as USGS maps, USDA Soil Conservation Service soil surveys, County inventories, basin studies, and other available resources. A

comparison of growth and land use patterns to the location of the sensitive or hazard areas will be made and a discussion of the level of effectiveness of critical area and building regulations will be provided. Mitigation measures to avoid, minimize or rectify impacts will be identified at a programmatic level.

Air Quality

The Air Quality analysis will outline requirements of federal, state and regional air quality regulations for the proposed alternatives. It will reference previous environmental documentation, applicable regulations, and air quality status of the county. The analysis will summarize air-monitoring data at continuous monitoring stations based on Northwest Clean Air Agency data. Existing emission inventories of selected pollutants will be summarized. The EIS will qualitatively compare the alternatives' potential to contribute to emissions based on an order of magnitude comparison of vehicle miles travelled (VMT) through the transportation modeling tasks. A summary of current County and regional climate change programs, including the Whatcom County Climate Protection and Energy Conservation Action Plan, September 2007, will be summarized. Mitigation strategies will be proposed.

Water Resources

The Water Resources Analysis will summarize existing conditions regarding water quantity and water quality based on available County and State inventories and analyses of critical areas. The analysis will address impacts of alternatives at a programmatic level using order of magnitude analysis (e.g. broad estimates of impervious surfaces based on acres and typical impervious surfaces associated with the use category), and identify current and recommended mitigation measures as appropriate.

Plants and Animals

Plant and animal habitat will be described based on existing County and State published sources. The analysis will address common impacts due to habitat alteration or habitat loss due to increased urban growth, comparing the three land use alternatives qualitatively.

Land and Shoreline Use

The land and shoreline use affected environment section will generally describe land use patterns in the county, including a description of location and distribution of urban, rural, and resource land uses. Potential land use impacts will be identified at a programmatic level for each of the alternatives including changes in activity levels, intensity of development, urban/rural land use patterns, land use compatibility, and ability to absorb the densities proposed. Mitigation measures will be identified to reduce impacts on land and shoreline uses including urban, rural, and resource lands.

Plans and Policies

The affected environment will describe the policy and regulatory context in the County. The impact analysis will evaluate the internal and external consistency of the proposed alternatives. Internal consistency will focus on the Comprehensive Plan update and proposed alternatives in the context of the County's plans and regulations. External consistency with relevant local, regional and state plans and policies including GMA Goals, Shoreline Management Act goals and requirements, Countywide Planning Policies, and local comprehensive plans will also be included.

Population and Employment

The EIS will assess impacts of the land use alternatives on employment, housing, and population in the County including growth rates, land capacity in relation to growth projections and related issues, using information generated in other population and economic tasks prepared for the UGA review process. The

EIS will identify mitigation measures to reduce impacts on housing, population, and employment. This may include reference to mitigation measures proposed in other elements of the environment.

Cultural Resources

The EIS section will describe current historic and cultural resources found in the County based upon published State and County sources including recent information collected for the Shoreline Management Program Update. Impacts will be discussed at a programmatic level. Mitigating measures, including federal, state and local requirements will be identified.

Transportation

Transportation model information will be incorporated into the EIS. Transportation inventory and existing conditions analysis results will comprise the Affected Environment. Impacts will be identified through analysis of future conditions for each of the three land use alternatives, and will primarily be based upon level of service (LOS) analysis results assuming current County LOS standards. The Whatcom Council of Government's model would be used to generate LOS results. Mitigation will consist of transportation improvement projects identified to address deficiencies. The mitigation section will also describe potential options under GMA relating to additional revenue sources, revisions to operational/concurrency standards, compatibility with city plans, and/or land use that could be implemented to ensure a balanced transportation plan that supports land uses proposed.

Public Services and Utilities

Using information generated through capital facilities plan review tasks, the Public Services and Utilities section will address both public and private services and utilities including:

- Police Services
- Fire and Emergency Medical Services
- Parks and Recreation
- Schools
- Water
- Wastewater
- Stormwater
- Solid Waste
- Power, Gas, and Telecommunication Utilities

The affected environment analysis will be based on current County, city, special district, and private utility providers' plans, and will generally describe the services provided and service areas. It will also include an analysis of current levels of service and capacity. The impact analysis will include projections for future demand based forecast growth and adopted levels of service. Mitigation measures will be programmatic in nature, and describe additional staffing, planned and proposed capital facilities, and other policies, programs, or regulations to reduce impacts on public services and utilities.