

Meeting Summary WHATCOM COUNTY GROWTH MANAGEMENT COORDINATING COUNCIL

October 1, 2008
3:00 to 5:00 pm
Whatcom Educational Credit Union (WECU)
5659 Barrett Road
Ferndale, WA

Welcome and Introductions

Jack Louws welcomed participants. The following Growth Management Coordinating Council (GMCC) members were present:

Whatcom County

Pete Kremen, County Executive
Sam Crawford, County Council
Seth Fleetwood, County Council

City of Bellingham

Dan Pike, Mayor
Barbara Ryan, City Council

City of Blaine

Bonnie Onyon, Mayor

City of Everson

Andy Rowson, City Council

City of Ferndale

Gary Jensen, Mayor

City of Lynden

Jack Louws, Mayor

City of Nooksack

Scott Bodven, City Council

City of Sumas

Bob Bromley, Mayor

Minutes Approval

The September 3, 2008 GMCC meeting minutes were approved without changes.

Population and Employment Forecasts

David Stalheim provided an overview of Technical Advisory Group recommendations on population and employment, which included:

1. Population: Use the extrapolation of the ECONorthwest baseline (most likely) population forecast to the year 2031, equaling approximately 257,000. The ECONorthwest forecast has performed well between 2000 and 2008 generally matching OFM estimates, and performing significantly better than OFM forecasts that were developed in the same year.

2. Employment: Based on the population estimate, develop an employment estimate by applying a labor force participation rate and employment rate that match observed trends. If one uses the extrapolated 2031 population figure from the ECONorthwest baseline forecast (approximately 257,000 residents) and if one assumes labor force participation and employment rates of 53% and 49% respectively, that would translate into forecasted labor participation of 136,200 and employment of 125,900 both for the year 2031.

Brett Sheckler, Berk and Associates, presented the technical memos on the population and employment forecasts.

The GMCC discussed the results and asked questions about the projections. Questions included whether a recommendation was needed at the meeting or not, what was the minimum horizon year the County needed to address, and whether the projections accounted for recent economic downturns?

David Stalheim indicated the GMCC was requested to make a recommendation, but that if postponed to November, the process could continue until then. David Stalheim also described public comments regarding the selection of forecasts, and some comments indicating the process is moving too fast and should wait for visioning workshops and other comments indicating the process is too slow. Comments to date were provided to the GMCC and the comments are posted at the County website (www.co.whatcom.wa.us/pds/2031). If the GMCC made a recommendation, it could provide a number for discussion with the public at upcoming workshops.

David Stalheim described the minimum horizon year was 2029 due to the UGA review, but that the 7-year review process is due in 2011, leading to a 2031 horizon. The OFM population range allows the County and cities to consider a broad range of possibilities. The selected number would be for the range of years 2029 to 2031.

Brett Sheckler described that the forecasts are based on historic trends over a long period.

The GMCC discussed the options of the TAG recommendations and that it represented the most likely scenario. The GMCC also discussed the recent economic conditions and how that might affect the future growth. The Bellingham City Council indicated a concern about slowing the process to allow the cities time to come up with their own numbers, while others noted the Growth Management Hearings Board timeline and the next steps to develop an allocation method. A motion was made and seconded to recommend a population forecast of 251,490 for the year 2031. The number is equal to the 2029 ECONorthwest baseline forecast extrapolated, but the projection would apply to the Year 2031. The lower number than the TAG recommendation would recognize uncertainties in economic conditions. If the compilation of County and city requests exceeded the proposed countywide number or was smaller than the countywide forecast it could be revisited. The motion passed 6 to 5.

The GMCC acknowledged and accepted the TAG recommended process to determine the employment forecast, based on the GMCC recommended population number.

The GMCC members intended to go back to their communities and discuss the forecast, and it would be discussed at vision workshops.

Regional Workshops, Questionnaire

Lisa Grueter, ICF Jones & Stokes reviewed the draft questionnaire with the GMCC members, including a newly proposed question regarding population forecasts. The GMCC agreed that a question asking about the preliminary countywide population forecast was appropriate and should give some context about historic growth too. GMCC members also requested that the questionnaire pose a question about rural growth. Additionally, members requested that the demographic question ask whether the respondent lived *in* as well as near a particular community. Other requests were to add a question on the type of housing respondents felt they would need in 20 years.

A postcard identifying the workshop dates was distributed (October 15 and 16, 2008). Cities and County representatives were encouraged to take the completed questionnaire to other stakeholder groups.

Other Business

No other business was conducted during this meeting.