

## ***EDWARD WANG***

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February 17, 2009

Mr. Matt Aamot  
Whatcom County Planning Dept.  
5280 Northwest Dr.  
Bellingham, WA 98226

Dear Mr. Aamot:

I see that Whatcom County is soliciting public comment relative to the growth planning process currently underway. Although I am a new resident of the county, I have spent the past 15 years as a municipal planning commissioner, councilperson, and 5 years as a Mayor in a community in Colorado which was experiencing explosive growth. I also served as a citizen representative to county advisory boards on growth and master planning. I believe this background gives me some perspective on what I've observed since moving here and on your process and alternatives.

As I've become more acquainted with my new home, I have been somewhat dismayed at what appears to be a haphazard and out-of-control growth management process that goes back for decades. It is clear that infrastructure needs, particularly in the areas of motor vehicle access and watershed protection, are not up to existing or necessary future requirements. Whatcom County, the City of Bellingham, and the other municipalities need to work together and coordinate growth planning. In my opinion, the "No Action Alternative" is not acceptable and should not be seriously considered.

A combination of aspects found in Alternatives X and Y appear to offer planning concepts that will do the most to preserve the rural character of the county. Development should be concentrated in areas closest to where municipal services are either currently available or reasonably feasible in the relatively near future, including the smaller towns. These areas should be zoned for the highest density that infrastructure can support, with rural areas downzoned to discourage high density development. Use of Transfer of Development Rights (TDRs) should be encouraged, with a land bank established to manage them, if not already in place.

Development should only be permitted where it preserves the maximum possible open space and the most efficient road networks. Cluster development should be encouraged and "cookie cutter" projects not allowed. A couple of years ago, I visited the area around Sequim and was horrified at the checkerboard nature of the development there. Whatcom County should not allow this sort of development pattern! Trading off permission for higher density, within clusters, to preserve open space and to provide amenities (e.g. pocket parks, recreational facilities, etc.) was a tool that worked with developers in my former jurisdiction. In-fill within the existing municipalities should take priority over additional rural sprawl.

Protection of the Lake Whatcom watershed must be of highest priority. I am aware that the water quality of the lake has already been identified as being at risk, and every measure available should be employed to protect that resource. Some of my neighbors have told me that lakeside property owners have protested limitations on the use of chemical fertilizers, and this simply must stop. The water supply and recreational uses (in that order) must be protected. The strongest possible controls must be placed on what is allowed within the watershed, even if politically unpopular. The needs of the population dependent upon that water supercede everything else.

A major contributor to loss of water quality is the additional phosphorus from disturbed soils that finds its way into the lake, as you know. Regulations need to be put in place to require Best Management Practices (BMPs) to reduce or eliminate these sources. It seems obvious to me that logging within the watershed must either cease entirely or be regulated to prevent runoff. This may require a multi-jurisdictional approach, as I have seen the clearcuts just on the other side of the Whatcom-Skagit County Line. Management of the power line on the east side of the lake also must be done in a manner to prevent herbicides or nutrients from migrating into the lake. The costs for remedial water treatment will be much higher than whatever costs incur from the needed regulations. Property values along the lake will plummet if water quality continues to degrade, as well.

I am sure you understand the significant of non-point-source pollution, and regulations and zoning need to be put in place to reduce this problem to the greatest extent possible. Although there is, apparently, some controversy regarding the required inspection of septic tanks, I urge the County to stick to their guns on this. I will mention, however, that a stronger public education program needs to be implemented, as there seems to be a fair amount of misinformation out there (judging from letters to the editor). Any development or other land disturbance needs to follow BMPs, and within a new Comprehensive Plan needs to be language to accommodate routine updating of those practices as new technologies and methods become available.

In terms of process, I suggest that considerable outreach and public involvement needs to happen, with the benefit of greater public “buy-in” the goal. Without the use of town meetings and/or study groups of all stakeholders, the revised plan will likely meet with vocal protest from those who resent government “interference” in what they perceive as their “rights.” If the plan is seen as a “top/down” one, the controversy will increase; but I do not know if your time frame will allow for this or if you already have done it.

I hope these comments are useful to you and that you will contact me if you need any clarification.

Sincerely:

Edward Wang