

February 18, 2009

Dear David Stalheim:

As I listen to the discussion of growth in Whatcom County, I am struck by the population increases in the rural areas as opposed to the Urban Growth Areas. There's plenty of evidence that most residents of our county would like to reduce the growth in the rural unincorporated areas.

I live in one of those rapidly growing rural areas, Glacier. According to the small areas data from the State Office of Financial Management website, Glacier is one of the fastest growing small areas in Washington. The figures indicate a population increase of some 273.5% since the turn of the century census. The table indicates that the error rate could be as much as 15% in these figures, but none-the-less, the growth rate is high.

In the Foothills Subarea Plan, Glacier and the surrounding area within a four-mile radius listed 895 dwellings. I can attest that more homes have been constructed since those 2006 figures. However, at the time, 128 dwellings were full time residences. Glacier is not a UGA and I do not believe anyone wishes it to become one, but the growth rate continues as more dwellings go up for sale are purchased for full time occupancy.

I, too, wish to maintain the environmental beauty of our county, and therefore, desire the newcomers, to the extent possible, be directed into the ten UGAs that have been created to accept growth. In order to do that, it seems we have to use the planning tools available in the Growth Management Act to make the UGAs more attractive to families moving here.

With projected growth for Whatcom County of over 60,000 people in the next 20-year planning period, I can't imagine anyone would take the position of reducing the number of UGAs to LAMIRDS. LAMIRDS were never designed to manage rural growth and they are an ineffective method of doing so. Some of them might need to be resized, but that seems to be a reasonable part of the planning efforts currently underway.

The optimal planning tools to manage growth come with a UGA designation. For the benefit of all Whatcom County residents, it is important that we maintain the broadest variety of alternatives at our disposal to manage the growth that is anticipated in the future.

In that spirit, I recommend the following scoping limits:

1. The population projections maintain a wide range across the alternatives as requested by the planners in some of the small towns. The figures from the GMCC growth projection of adding 60,400 people in the planning period should be the minimum or low figure for the EIS range and it should proceed to a high figure from there.
2. The UGAs as described in the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan should be the basis of the EIS and the alternatives should only be reasonable and legal alternatives to what exists today. No alternatives should include any option to downgrade any existing UGAs to LAMIRDS, including the Columbia Valley UGA.
3. Rural areas should also remain outside the scope of this EIS.

Sincerely,

Lou J. Piotrowski
Glacier