



CITY OF BLAINE

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT

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MEMORANDUM

Date: October 27, 2009
To: Whatcom County Council
From: Michael Jones, Blaine Community Development Director
Cc: Blaine City Council
Gary Tomsic, Blaine City Manager

Re: City of Blaine's Response to Whatcom County Council's request for information

On October 19, 2009 Whatcom County distributed a memo to the elected officials of various incorporated cities. The memo included a summary of the actions to date related to the County's UGA review, and included questions for most cities.

Below is an excerpt from the memo that applies to Blaine.

Blaine

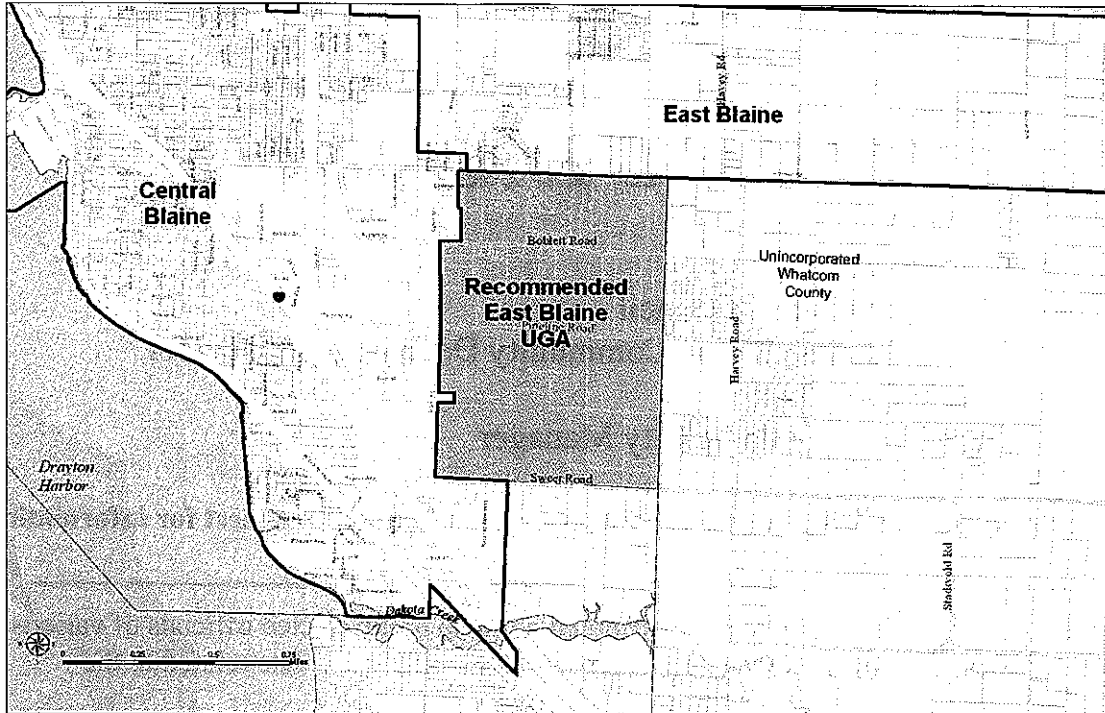
Executive recommendation: The Whatcom County Executive recommended removal of the West Blaine Urban Growth Area and inclusion of the area to the east (Odell Street).

County Planning Commission initial recommendation: The Whatcom County Planning Commission has supported the County Executive's recommendation for Blaine.

County Council Committee questions: The County Council Planning and Development Committee has questions about these issues and would appreciate a response from the city:

1. Odell Street Area. The city has significant excess land capacity for residential development, and expansion beyond the city limits may not be necessary if land use plans are changed. Our question to the city is:
 - a. Is there a way to accommodate the growth planned for the East Blaine area in parts of the existing city limits? If not, why?

The area discussed in the County's question is illustrated by the map below. This was included in the City's recommendation, where the City proposed the retention of this area to serve the needs of increased manufacturing and job growth.



The East Blaine Planning Area was a topic of discussion at the County Planning Commission and at the County Council Committee meetings. The East Blaine Planning Area is the pan-handle that extends east along the international boundary from the Central Blaine Planning Area, and should not be confused with the East Blaine UGA. In this document the East Blaine UGA will be referred to simply as the UGA to avoid confusion.

Is there a way to accommodate the growth for the East Blaine UGA within the existing City limits?

The City's answer is simply, "No, there is not a practical way to accommodate increased industrial and manufacturing growth within the existing city limits by adjusting land use plans."

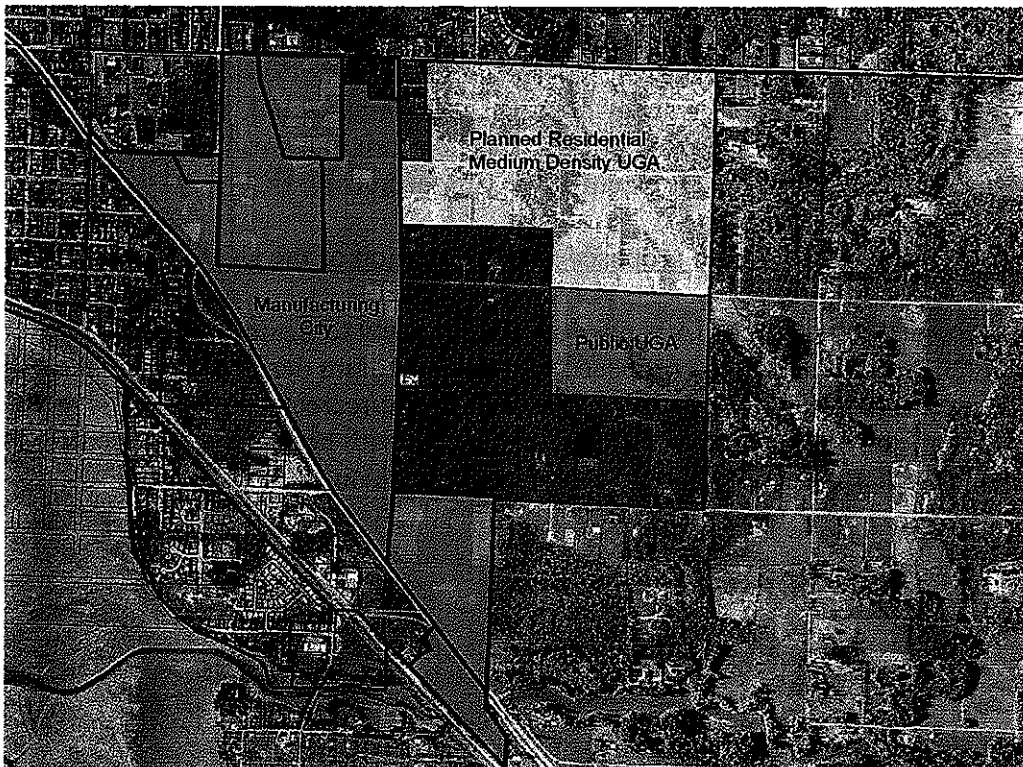
Why is this the right place for expanded manufacturing land?

The City recently rezoned 45 acres from "Airport" to "Gateway," a new land use district oriented towards industry and commerce, to add manufacturing land in this vicinity. Even with this action the City still has a shortfall in regard to job growth capacity which is illustrated in the County's land inventory calculations.

The proposed manufacturing district in the UGA has the benefit of excellent transportation linkages, close freeway access, proximity to existing industrial development, nearby emergency services, good terrain and readily available industrial grade utility services.

- Odell Road (the boundary between the City and the UGA is a fully improved truck route. The City dedicated substantial funding and effort to having the roadway improved. In addition, Washington State CERB funding was used for the roadway based on serving manufacturing uses on both sides of the street.

- As you read this, the City is developing Boblett Street through the former airport site as a truck route to enhance circulation and to reduce the travel distance between the manufacturing district and SR-543 (i.e. the Truck Route), Interstate-5, and the Pacific Port of Entry (i.e. the Truck Crossing).
- The combination of freeway access and border access is something available nowhere else in Washington State. The close access to SR 543 and the border crossing is key to import/export, warehousing, and manufacturing industries choosing this location. Other underdeveloped parts of the City do not have the same access.
- Both water and sewer facilities are located in Odell Road adjacent to the UGA's western boundary. These facilities have been sized to accommodate the development of this *existing* UGA. High pressure water service was developed in this are to serve current and future industry.
- The City has been working for over 6 years with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Washington State DOT for a full service interchange at Exit 274. This interchange is designed to serve the current and future manufacturing areas as well as the south end of the City in general. After years of work, the final Interchange Justification Report has been submitted to FHWA for signature.
- The Northwest Whatcom Fire and Rescue fire station (built by the City in 2003) is on the east side of Odell Road, virtually within the UGA. A primary reason the City built in this location was to provide a fast response time to the surrounding manufacturing uses.
- The terrain in the future manufacturing part of the UGA is generally level and most of the property is in large lots making it suitable for manufacturing development.



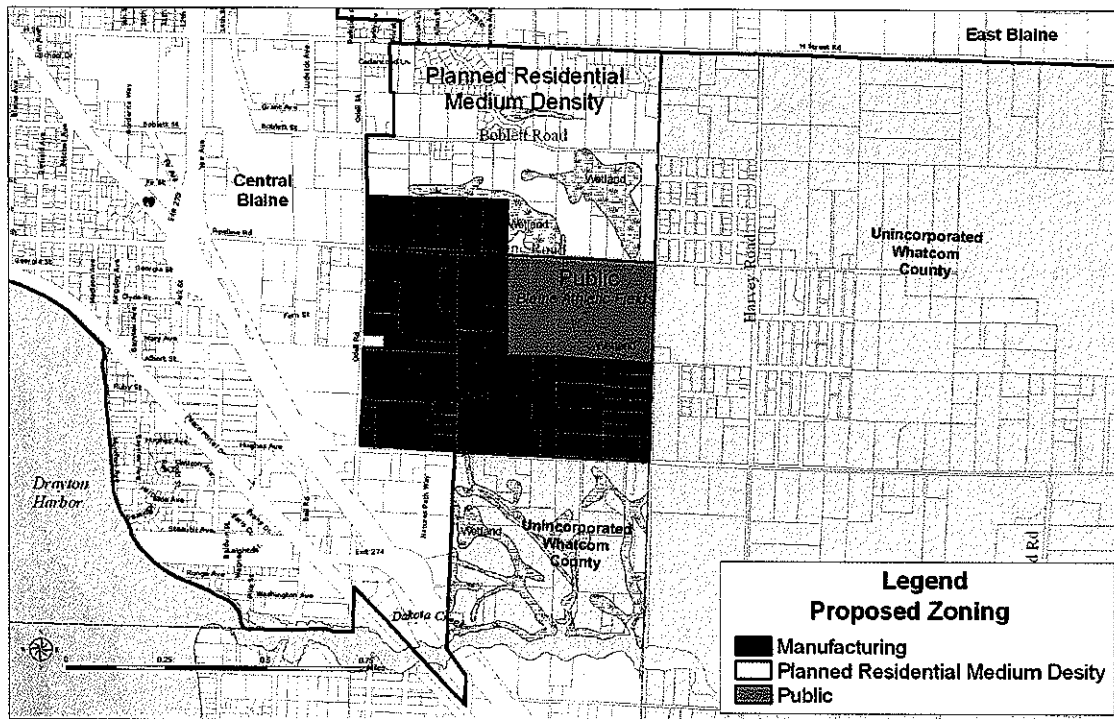
Why is the East Blaine Planning Area (within the city limits) not suitable to accommodate increased employment growth?

There are a variety of reasons why the largest tracts of available land already within the City limits are not suitable to accommodate manufacturing job growth.

- H Street provides the primary corridor for accessing the East Blaine Planning Area and it is not well suited to commercial truck traffic due to a steep grade within the City and due to the fact that it is bounded on the south by low-density urban development in the County. It would provide a poor connection to any industrial development that might occur in the East Blaine Planning Area.
- The City has planned a secondary connector for the East Blaine Planning Area, but that route is designed as a relatively narrow "parkway" which will wind through new residential districts before entering the Central Blaine Planning Area where it continues through established neighborhoods before reaching downtown and the freeway. This road will be an excellent neighborhood collector for residential growth, but would not be suitable for commercial truck traffic or access to an industrial zone.
- The East Blaine Planning Area is a gently sloping upland with a number of large wetlands that lies uphill from the City's watershed/wellhead protection area. As such it is a critical recharge area and aquifer protection area. It would be inappropriate to site industrial uses above an aquifer that is critical to the future drinking water needs of the City (and Birch Bay Water and Sewer customers).
- The East Blaine Planning Area may look like large undeveloped tracts suitable for a wide range of future options, but the City has two large development applications vested for the planning area. These two projects, Grandis Pond 438 acres, 1,030 units, and East Maple Ridge 89 acres, 353 units essentially bookend the planning area. Any attempt to include industrial development in the area would split a future neighborhood and defeat extensive planning efforts. Furthermore, the area is bounded on the north by suburban residential development in the City of Surrey, BC.

Why is there residential land use proposed within a portion of the UGA?

The City recognizes that the UGA is not dedicated entirely to manufacturing land uses. A portion of the area in the UGA is proposed for future medium density residential use, and a portion is proposed for public/recreation use. The public/recreation land area is the Blaine Athletic Complex owned by the Blaine School District with no realistic expectation that it will convert to any other use within the 20-year planning horizon.



As you are aware, the County's land use inventory analysis does not demonstrate a need for additional residential area. However, the proposed medium density residential land area captures an area of urban levels of development that exist within the County and the UGA. It is also designed to create future boundaries that are not overly irregular and illogical. In addition to the geometric reason for including the area, there are a number of other compelling points to consider

- The existing residential development is served by septic systems in a fairly high concentration. Bringing them into the City will allow for conversion to sanitary sewer.
- The inclusion of the area makes gravity flow sewer service possible for a large section of the City's East Blaine Planning Area, and the infrastructure has long been planned to go through this *existing* UGA.
- This area of higher density residential development will enhance the nearby commercial district by providing a larger customer base within walking distance.
- The area is generally less impacted by critical areas than some areas within the City, it has good access, and a southern exposure which makes it well suited to residential development.
- There is a steep slope that transects this area and the grade differences makes it appropriate to use the northern areas for industrial land uses that do not require large flat land areas.

