

Kate Blystone - Fwd: Urban Growth Area Review



From: Council
To: 2009 Councilmembers; Becky Boxx; Kate Blystone; Rebecca Craven
Date: 11/23/2009 8:47 AM
Subject: Fwd: Urban Growth Area Review
Attachments: Hirst on UGA Review 11 21 2009.pdf

>>> Eric Hirst <EricHirst@comcast.net> 11/21/2009 7:07 PM >>>
Dear Members of the Whatcom County Council,

Attached are my comments ahead of Tuesday's public hearing on the county's Urban Growth Area Review. I strongly urge the council and executive to agree on the size and locations of the 10 UGAs to meet the December 1 deadline.

Thanks.

Eric

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November 21, 2009

Whatcom County Council
Bellingham, WA 98225

Public Hearing on Urban Growth Area Review, November 24, 2009

Dear Whatcom County Council Members,

I very much appreciate the hard work done by so many parties to develop proposals for the county's 10-year urban growth area (UGA) review, including the Planning and Development Department, the County Executive, the Planning Commission, and the County Council. The various proposals all represent major improvements over the current situation with greatly oversized UGAs throughout Whatcom County. Shrinking these bloated UGAs will protect farms and forests, prevent sprawl, protect water quality, and provide additional environmental, social, and financial benefits for Whatcom County residents.

I strongly urge the council and executive to agree soon on the size and locations of the 10 UGAs in order to meet the December 1, 2009 deadline imposed by the Western Washington Growth Management Hearings Board. Because the county is years behind schedule, we must meet this deadline, which itself has been extended by five months. Failure to do so will jeopardize state funding opportunities and further delay the county's ability to implement a much-needed system of development impact fees. The council and executive are in close agreement on most details related to the ten UGAs. Let's resolve the remaining issues quickly so we can move on.

The final decisions on UGA review and revision, in my view, should:

- **Ensure that UGAs are no larger than needed** to accommodate the number of new people the county decides is appropriate in total and for each UGA. The county's population forecast completely ignores the current recession, which is dramatically slowing growth in Whatcom County. If UGAs later need to be resized, we can do so in 2011 during the comprehensive plan update.
- **Protect farms and forests from further development.** Although this goal is addressed explicitly in the forthcoming Rural Element Update, expanding city boundaries consumes lands that are productive for agriculture and forestry. This is an especially important issue for Lynden, which would like to expand onto land that has excellent soils for farming. In addition, Lynden's proposal ignores its problems with sufficient water rights and the very high cost to drain the lands it proposes to include within its UGA.
- **Protect water quality.** We need to protect better our key water bodies, including Lake Padden, Lake Whatcom, Drayton Harbor and Birch Bay. These areas should be removed from UGAs and managed to restore water quality and protect their watersheds.
- **Prevent sprawl in rural areas.** Doing so has many environmental benefits (wildlife protection, reduced flooding, and better water quality) and social benefits (maintain the

healthy diversity of livelihoods, lifestyles, and landscapes we currently enjoy in Whatcom County). The county should include no agricultural lands inside UGAs. Farmland that is now within a UGA should be taken out of the UGA and other lands, if necessary, should be substituted.

- **Create Urban Growth Area Reserves.** The proposed Reserves provide a sensible way to deal with the enormous uncertainties about future population and employment growth, where that growth will occur within the county, and county and municipal policies that affect growth. These Reserves remain rural (i.e., homes on no less than 10 acres), which assures that if needed for urban growth they will not have been spoiled by sprawl. If not needed for urban growth, these areas remain rural and largely undeveloped.

In closing, the county has made substantial progress on reviewing and revising its 10 UGAs during the past year. It is now time to make the final decisions and meet the December 1 deadline.

Thank you.

Eric Hirst

cc: Pete Kremen, County Executive
David Stalheim, Director of Planning and Development Services