

From: Becky Boxx
To: Council
CC: David Stalheim; Kate Blystone; Matt Aamot
Date: 11/23/2009 3:22 PM
Subject: Fwd: Whatcom County Population Projections for 2031
Place: Council

>>> "Rabel Burdge" <burdge@comcast.net> 11/23/2009 2:41 PM >>>
Becky: Could you forward this note to the County Council? Thanks, Rabel

Be of Good Cheer--Whatcom County Population Projections for 2031.[1]

Members of the Whatcom County Council members may be of good cheer as the holiday season approaches. The population and job numbers for Whatcom County advanced by the Executive and several cities in the County are based on Chamber of Commerce hopes and a faulty comparison period. The Office of Financial Management's (OFM) low projection for 2031 of 217,000 persons with proportionately lower job numbers is more likely. Many of the cities presented the Whatcom County Planning Commission with population projections based on the 1990-2000 period. That was a time of a massive net immigration in both the County and the State of Washington that fueled a housing boom in the Puget Sound area.

You must consider the important trends which show that the growth we have experienced since 1990 will be radically different in the coming decades. A few of the key trends are as follows:

- 1.. The public and private school enrollment figures in the elementary grades continue to decline as the echo-echo effect of the "boomers" produces an even lower birth rate. Nationwide fertility rates (number of live births per female in the child bearing years) appear normal due to the high birth rate among Hispanic females. However, birth rates for Non-Hispanic and Black females are below population replacement levels.

- 2.. Hispanic students represent an increasing share of the school age population, particularly in the elementary grades. Most of the Hispanic students are receiving a reduced price or a free lunch indicating they come from relatively low-income families. These same families will be in need of low-cost, affordable housing and not the housing provided in middle class tract or custom developments.

- 3.. Building permits issued in both Whatcom County and the City of Bellingham have fallen dramatically in the last year.

- 4.. Occupancy permits for multi-family units are also down considerably.

- 5.. Building permits issued for single family units is much greater than the actual number completed.

- 6.. A main source of growth in Whatcom County during the 1990's was the steady increase in enrollment at WWU. The original high target for growth was the addition of 300 full-time students per year up to a maximum of 15,000. That maximum number has now been scaled back to 13,000 (approximate current enrollment) with proportionally less future faculty and staff.

- 7.. The unemployment rate continues to rise in Whatcom County and mirrors that of the entire state. Family-Living wage jobs seem to have taken the biggest hit. The current unemployed and under employed and those who stopped looking for a job must find work before we can estimate future job numbers. For example, in 2008 estimated employment in the City of Bellingham was 51,153. Of that number, approximately 9.6% or 4,911 persons are presently unemployed. According to the Executive Report, projected employment in Bellingham for 2029 is 69,982. To meet that projection we must add

23,740 jobs, 1,187 per year or 3.3 jobs every day for the next 20 years.

8.. Vacant and seasonal housing for the entire County is about 16% of all the units, indicating much over capacity.

9.. The costs for the County and the Cities to service a stable, rather than an inflated human population over the next two decades, must be spelled out for all capital facilities to include the cost and skills of government workers needed to service them.

[1] Prepared by Rabel J Burdge, Member, Whatcom County Planning Commission. He may be reached at burdge@comcast.net. These observations have not been endorsed by the Whatcom County Planning Commission.