



Land Capacity & Demand Results

WHATCOM 2031 ■ Urban Growth Area Review ■ February 10, 2009

Overview

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide the Whatcom County Council and Whatcom County Planning Commission with an ***initial*** analysis of the capacity of the ten urban growth areas in Whatcom County to accommodate growth over the next twenty year period.

This is an initial report and is subject to continuing review and adjustment following public input and collaboration with cities. Specifically, we anticipate that there will be three stages to this Land Capacity and Demand analysis:

Stage 1 – initial report released in February 2009

Stage 2 – revised report based on technical corrections to be released in March 2009

Stage 3 – final report based on recommended boundaries following EIS preparation;
scheduled date is May – June, 2009

Methodology

The land capacity analysis includes a review of land supply and land demand. ***Land demand*** is based on the two growth allocation alternatives outlined in the Phase I allocation memo prepared by Berk and Associates dated January 13, 2009. These two allocation alternatives use the Growth Management Coordinating Council's recommendation of a total Whatcom County population forecast of 251,490¹ and employment forecast of an additional 33,909 employees. Changes to the results can be easily accommodated if the Whatcom County Council chooses a different population and employment forecast than recommended by the Growth Management Coordinating Council.

Land supply is an estimate of the amount of residential and employment land available within the ten designated urban growth areas. The analysis identifies land supply for either existing city limits or the unincorporated portions of the current urban growth area designation. The surplus or shortfall is based on the combination of both the city and unincorporated urban growth area designation.

The land capacity analysis is based on the ***methodology*** presented to the Whatcom County Council after recommendation from the Growth Management Coordinating Council. The methodology is attached to this report for reference.

¹ For purposes of review under the State Environmental Policy Act, the planning directors have recommended that we study the OFM "most likely" population growth forecast in Whatcom County of 258,448, with a corresponding employment forecast of 37,194.

Staff from the cities and county have identified issues with the methodology, some of which have been incorporated into this analysis and some of which needs further discussion and public input. The following are a list of issues with the methodology at this point in the process:

- Planned vs. achieved densities – Whatcom County used “planned densities” of the underlying zoning for this analysis. The methodology allows some flexibility or interpretation in how to assign densities. A concern raised by some cities is that the planned densities are not the “achieved densities” that cities have been experiencing. We have begun to assemble the achieved densities information and this can be used to later amend the assumed densities within the land capacity analysis. County staff has suggested that cities make any proposed adjustments to assumed densities to the county in their proposed urban growth areas.

For context, please note that Whatcom County just recently addressed the issue of achieved versus planned densities in the Bellingham Urban Growth Area case. The conclusion of the Western Washington Growth Management Hearings Board affirms that the UGA can be based on the prospective planning aspect, rather than relatively low density. The difference between planned densities and achieved densities is a discussion between the county and cities that should occur in the next phase of the project.

It was difficult to assign planned densities to some city zoning districts due to the complexity of the zones. Mixed use zones are particularly challenging in assigning residential densities. We have asked city staff to review the assumptions in the technical analysis and provide additional documentation that the county can use.

- Rural densities in urban areas – There are rural density land use zones within urban growth areas. Whatcom County used urban level densities unless there was a specific growth management exception that authorized lower densities. Whatcom County has an order from the Growth Management Hearings Board that densities less than four (4) units per acre are not urban densities. Within some urban growth areas, there are land use designations of one (1) unit per five (5) acres. This is a rural density not supported by our order. However, in sensitive watersheds, we have been provided an exception for lower densities. Thus, for those areas where we have assumed four (4) units per acre but the city has a Growth Management justification, Whatcom County needs a proposal that can be verified as part of the review process.
- Partially developed residential property – The methodology may be overestimating redevelopment of partially utilized residential property. More analysis is needed to determine a fair and consistent manner in which to analyze the ability to redevelop partially used property.
- Infrastructure subtraction – Additional review and confirmation of the amount of area that is set aside for roads, stormwater and public infrastructure may be necessary.

This can affect land supply fairly significantly, so having good recent data is needed to provide documentation for this subtraction.

- Commercial and Industrial Land Demand – generalized assumptions were needed to complete the analysis if additional data from the cities was not available. Some of these assumptions change the land supply conclusions. We would ask that cities review:
 - Floor Area Ratios – The floor area ratio for commercial, industrial and retail property. This is the ratio of how much floor area to property is required to accommodate employment. This figure can greatly affect conclusions, so review of that number is warranted.
 - Economic Development Plans or Studies – We would encourage cities to provide economic development elements or strategies that would provide the documentation necessary for additional land supply for commercial and industrial lands.

Land Demand

The land capacity analysis was based on the Growth Management Coordinating Council's recommended Whatcom County population forecast of 251,490 and an additional employment growth of 33,909. The land demand was then compared to two different growth allocation scenarios outlined in the Phase 1 Growth Allocation paper.

Where an Urban Growth Areas population/employment capacity and developable land supply exceeds the projected population/employment growth and amount of land needed for that growth, a surplus is shown (where the reverse is true, the shortfall is shown). The Growth Management Act requires Urban Growth Areas to be adequately sized to accommodate the projected urban growth. If the demand exceeds the supply, or the supply exceeds the demand, then Urban Growth Area may not be adequately sized.

The Environmental Impact Statement will test different land supply and demand alternatives for the urban growth areas. Thus, the preliminary numbers from the Growth Management Coordinating Council should be used as a benchmark for conversation with the public and cities. The initial results begin to identify which Urban Growth Areas have excess supply, or more demand than supply. Adjustments based on public input, city proposals and county decisions will affect the final results.

Table 1, Land Demand for Residential Population

Source: Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan, Growth Management Coordinating Council Total Population Forecast Recommendation and two alternative allocation scenarios

TOTAL 2029-31 POPULATION FORECAST: 251,490
 CURRENT (2008) POPULATION: 191,000
 NET POPULATION GROWTH: 60,490

UGA	Planning Horizon: 2022	Planning Horizon: 2029-31	
	Current Allocation	Historic Growth Allocation	Current Policy Based Allocation
Bellingham UGA	35,015	26,920	31,101
Birch Bay UGA	5,116	2,907	4,545
Blaine UGA	3,163	2,226	2,809
Cherry Point UGA			
Columbia Valley UGA	2,510	3,304	2,229
Everson UGA	1,656	594	1,471
Ferndale UGA	7,388	4,816	6,562
Lynden UGA	7,296	4,948	6,480
Nooksack UGA	986	498	876
Sumas UGA	674	466	599
Rural Growth	4,299	13,811	3,818
TOTALS	68,103	60,490	60,490

Table 2, Land Demand for Employment

Source: Growth Management Coordinating Council Total Forecast Recommendation with two alternative allocation scenarios

TOTAL EMPLOYMENT FORECAST: 111,335
 CURRENT NON-AG EMPLOYMENT: 77,426
 NET EMPLOYMENT GROWTH: 33,909

UGA	Planning Horizon: 2029-31	
	Current Job Distribution Scenario	Regional/Local Job Distribution
Bellingham UGA	21,714	21,188
Birch Bay UGA	183	739
Blaine UGA	1,370	1,527
Cherry Point UGA	630	542
Columbia Valley UGA	39	840
Everson UGA	292	151
Ferndale UGA	2,602	2,763
Lynden UGA	2,084	2,404
Nooksack UGA	97	127
Sumas UGA	136	118
Rural Growth	4,762	3,510
TOTALS	33,909	33,909

Initial Results

Based on the initial growth forecast from the Growth Management Coordinating Council and the alternative allocation of population to various urban growth areas, there is only one Urban Growth Area that is likely not large enough to accommodate the projected growth: Lynden. The Columbia Valley Urban Growth Area might also be undersized for historic growth patterns, but the Whatcom County Planning Commission has recommended that the Urban Growth Area be removed for this area.

Two urban growth areas appear from the preliminary results as being oversized for the projected population growth: Blaine and Ferndale. It is important to keep in mind that the analysis includes areas that have been designated as both short term and long term Urban Growth Areas. Adjustments to land demand assumptions and/or population allocations would also change the results.

The initial analysis appears to show sufficient overall capacity to accommodate future employment in the county as well. However, attention needs to be paid to whether or not there is the right mix of land available for the various employment sectors. For example, while the conclusions might show a surplus of land for overall employment, when you look into the details there may be insufficient land for industrial employment. Additional review in these various sectors are necessary before reaching any conclusions about land supply for employment.

To recap, the Land Capacity Analysis will go through at least three phases over the next several months. Technical corrections and methodology changes to land supply will affect the outcome of the analysis. Policy choices as to some methodology changes and growth forecasts will also affect the outcome of the analysis. These inputs will take place in the next stage of the Urban Growth Area review process.

Stage 1 – initial report released in February 2009

Stage 2 – revised report based on technical corrections to be released in March 2009

Stage 3 – final report based on recommended boundaries following EIS preparation;
scheduled date is May – June, 2009

The tables on the following pages outline the initial summary findings of the various Urban Growth Areas.

Table 3. Comparison: Population Growth Accommodated and Projected - Phase I Allocation using GMCC Recommended Population Forecast of 251,490 (see Exhibit 4 of 1-13-09 Phase I Allocation Memo)

UGA	Population Growth Accommodated on Net Developable Acres			Historic Growth Allocation Scenario		Current Policy Based Allocation Scenario	
	City	Unincorporated	Overall	Projected Population Growth	Surplus (Shortfall) in Population	Projected Population Growth	Surplus (Shortfall) in Population
Bellingham UGA	20,578	11,665	32,242	26,920	5,322	31,101	1,141
Birch Bay UGA	-	7,510	7,510	2,907	4,603	4,545	2,965
Blaine UGA	10,857	11,863	22,720	2,226	20,494	2,809	19,911
Cherry Point UGA							
Columbia Valley UGA	-	3,079	3,079	3,304	(225)	2,229	850
Everson UGA	1,310	1,400	2,711	594	2,117	1,471	1,240
Ferndale UGA	9,981	10,884	20,864	4,816	16,048	6,562	14,302
Lynden UGA	2,249	2,307	4,557	4,948	(391)	6,480	(1,923)
Nooksack UGA	889	740	1,629	498	1,131	876	753
Sumas UGA	908	833	1,740	466	1,274	599	1,141
TOTAL URBAN GROWTH	46,771	50,280	97,052	46,679	50,373	56,672	40,380
RURAL GROWTH				13,811		3,818	
TOTAL POPULATION GROWTH				60,490		60,490	

Table 4. Comparison: Residential Net Developable Acres Available and Needed - Phase I Allocation using GMCC Recommended Population Forecast of 251,490 (see Exhibit 4 of 1-13-09 Phase I Allocation Memo)

UGA	Residential Net Developable Acres Available			Historic Growth Allocation Scenario		Current Policy Based Allocation Scenario	
	City	Unincorporated	Overall	Residential Net Dev. Acres Needed	Surplus (Shortfall) in Acres	Residential Net Dev. Acres Needed	Surplus (Shortfall) in Acres
Bellingham UGA	937	669	1,606	1,277	329	1,535	71
Birch Bay UGA	-	825	825	381	444	539	286
Blaine UGA	686	1,103	1,789	(122)	1,911	(67)	1,857
Cherry Point UGA							
Columbia Valley UGA	-	337	337	361	(24)	246	91
Everson UGA	85	126	211	47	164	115	96
Ferndale UGA	349	1,102	1,451	366	1,085	484	967
Lynden UGA	219	107	325	348	(23)	438	(113)
Nooksack UGA	51	54	104	22	82	50	55
Sumas UGA	78	50	128	47	81	55	73
TOTAL URBAN GROWTH	2,405	4,371	6,776	2,727	4,049	3,395	3,381

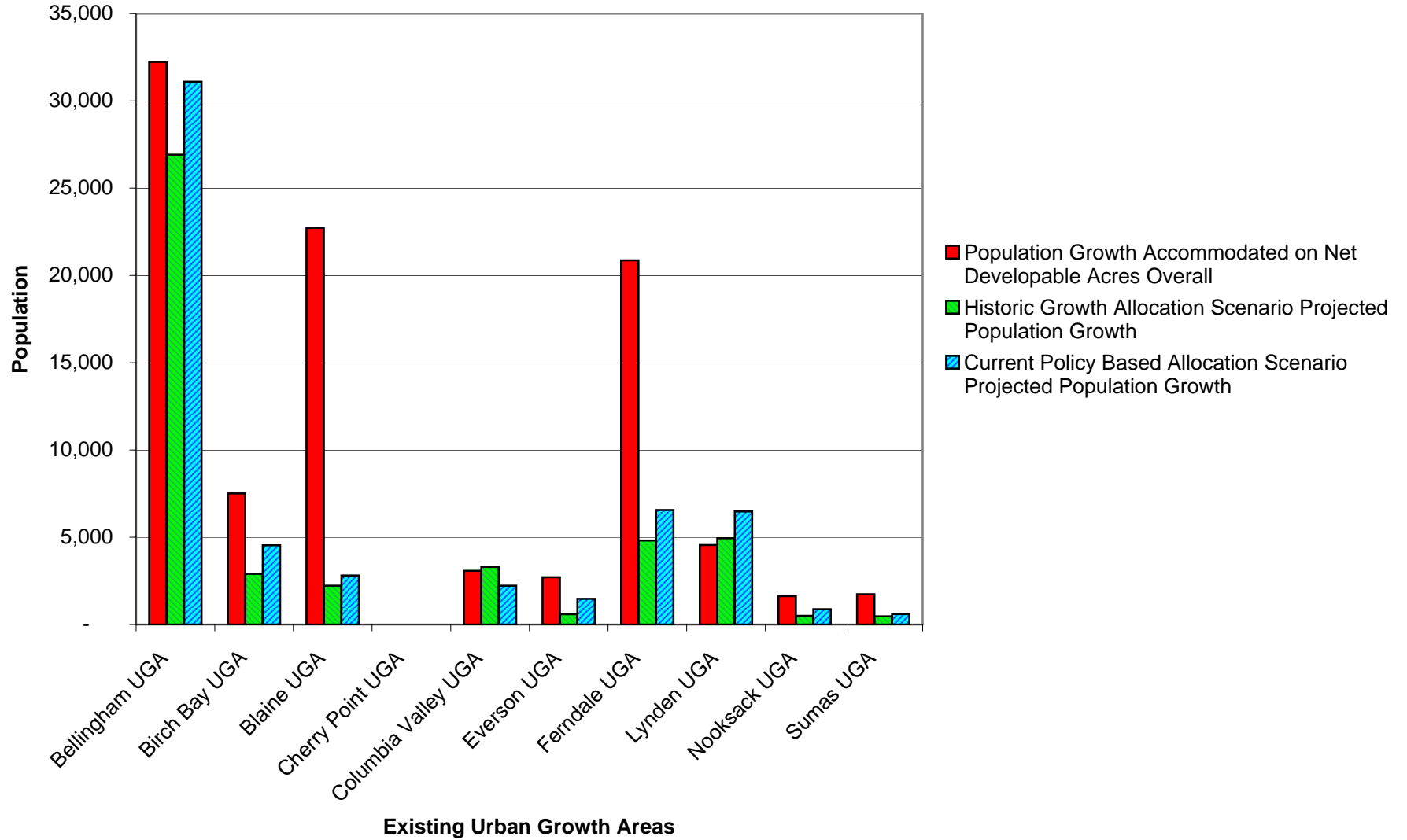
Table 5. Comparison: Employment Growth Accommodated and Projected - Phase I Allocation using GMCC Recommended Employment Forecast of 33,909 (see Exhibit 9 of 1-13-09 Phase I Allocation Memo)

UGA	Employment Growth Accommodated on Net Developable Acres			Historic Growth Allocation Scenario		Regional/Local Job Distribution Allocation	
	City	Unincorporated	Overall	Employment Growth Projected	Surplus (Shortfall) in Employees	Employment Growth Projected	Surplus (Shortfall) in Employees
Bellingham UGA	17,754	8,864	26,617	21,714	4,903	21,188	5,429
Birch Bay UGA	-	1,741	1,741	182	1,559	739	1,002
Blaine UGA	2,020	-	2,020	1,370	650	1,527	493
Cherry Point UGA	-	2,046	2,046	630	1,416	542	1,504
Columbia Valley UGA	-	963	963	39	924	840	123
Everson UGA	1,047	1,495	2,542	293	2,249	151	2,391
Ferndale UGA	6,099	5,193	11,292	2,603	8,689	2,762	8,530
Lynden UGA	6,312	2,381	8,693	2,084	6,609	2,402	6,291
Nooksack UGA	357	292	649	97	552	126	523
Sumas UGA	2,302	387	2,689	136	2,553	118	2,571
TOTAL URBAN GROWTH	35,890	23,361	59,252	29,148	30,104	30,395	28,857

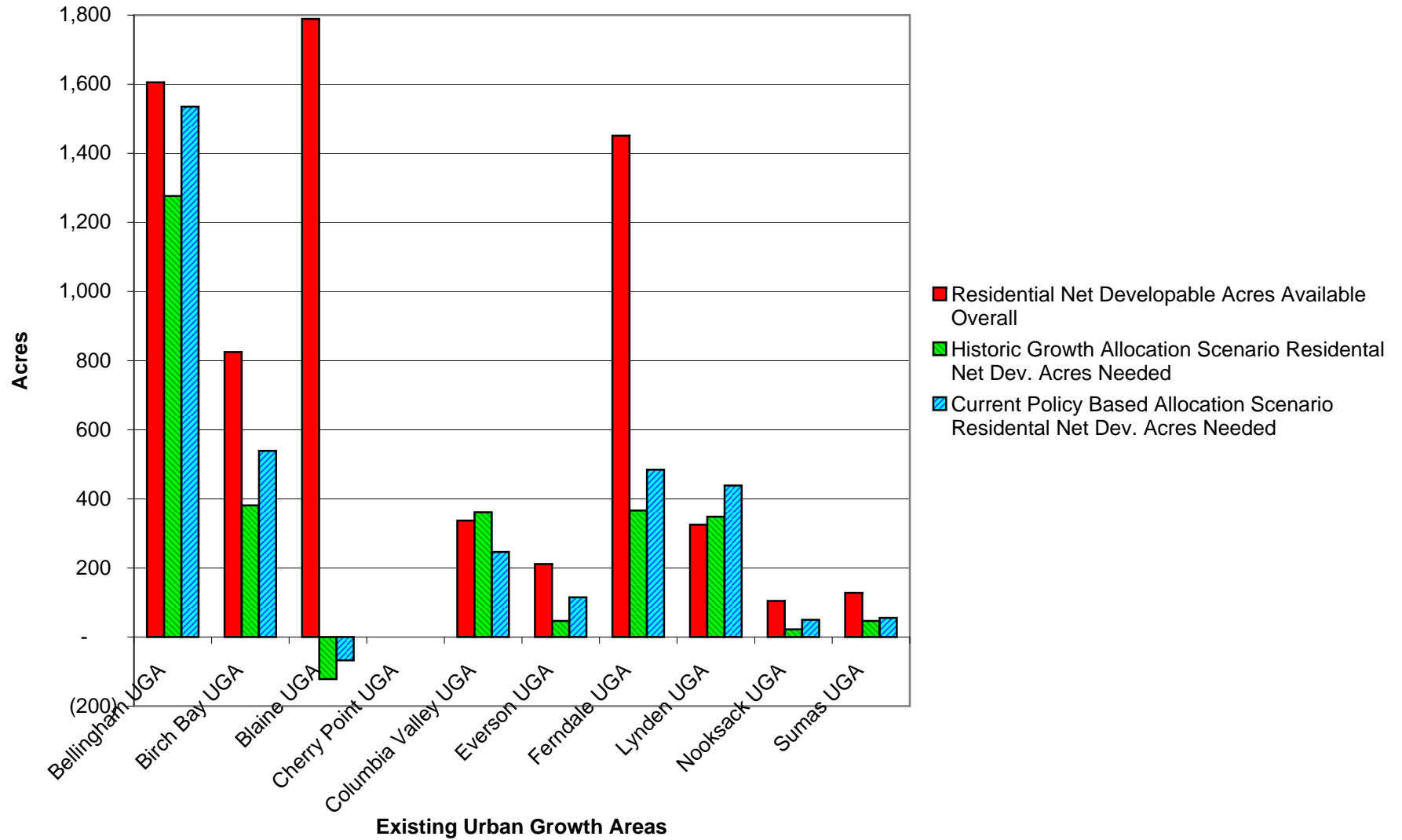
Table 6. Comparison: Comm./Ind. Net Developable Acres Available and Needed - Phase I Allocation using Current Job Distribution Allocation Scenario (see Exhibit 9 of 1-13-09 Phase I Allocation Memo)

UGA	Comm./Industrial Net Developable Acres Available			Historic Growth Allocation Scenario		Regional/Local Job Distribution Allocation	
	City	Unincorporated	Overall	Comm./Ind. Net Dev. Acres Needed	Surplus (Shortfall) in Acres	Comm./Ind. Net Dev. Acres Needed	Surplus (Shortfall) in Acres
Bellingham UGA	939	800	1,739	1,093	646	1,063	676
Birch Bay UGA	-	107	107	16	90	49	58
Blaine UGA	90	-	90	52	37	61	28
Cherry Point UGA	-	1,468	1,468	442	1,026	442	1,026
Columbia Valley UGA	-	61	61	2	58	53	8
Everson UGA	50	126	176	37	139	28	148
Ferndale UGA	340	255	595	92	503	94	501
Lynden UGA	276	133	409	60	349	77	333
Nooksack UGA	17	14	31	4	27	5	26
Sumas UGA	132	19	151	8	143	7	144
TOTAL	1,845	2,981	4,826	1,806	3,020	1,878	2,948

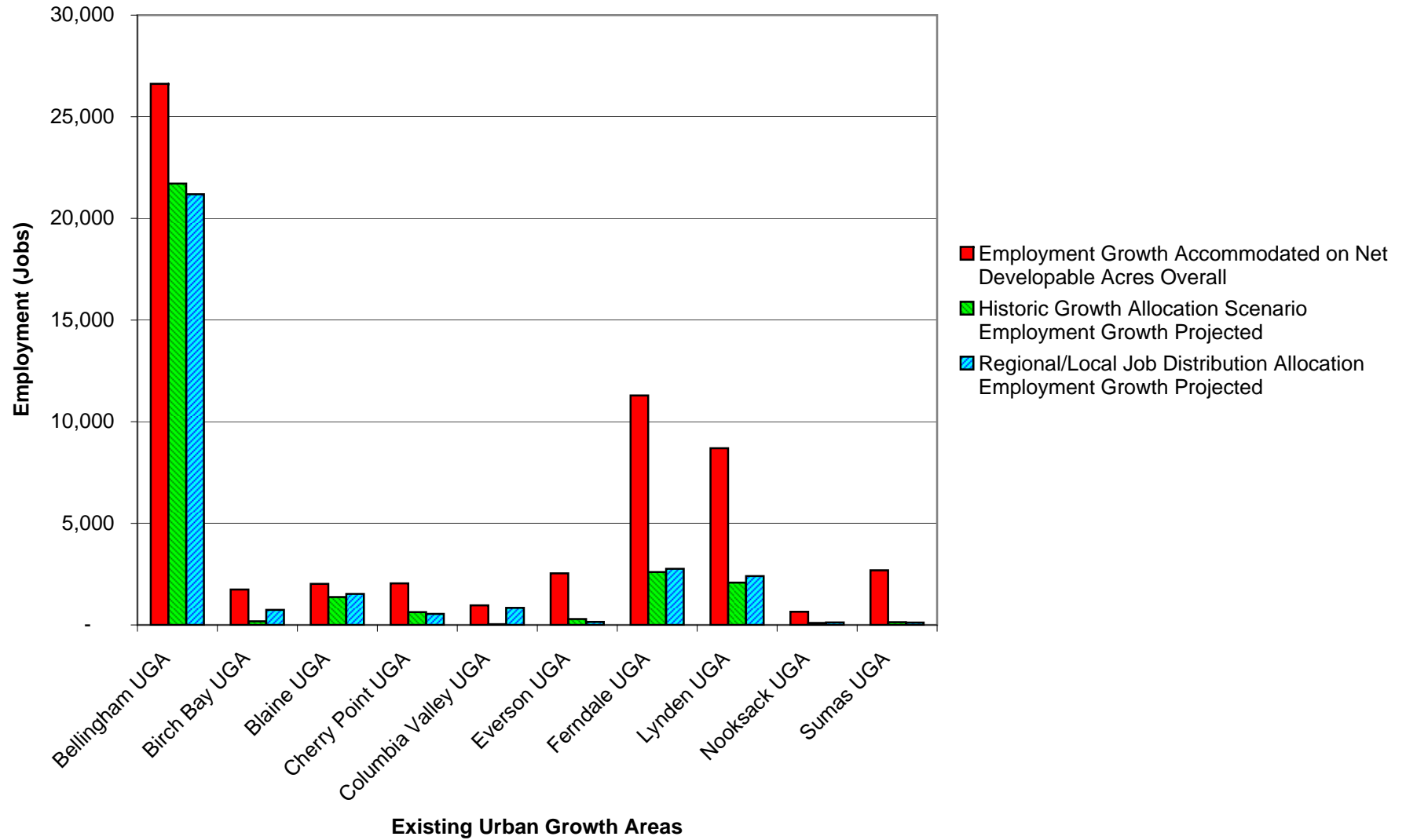
Land Capacity - Population Growth Allocation Comparison



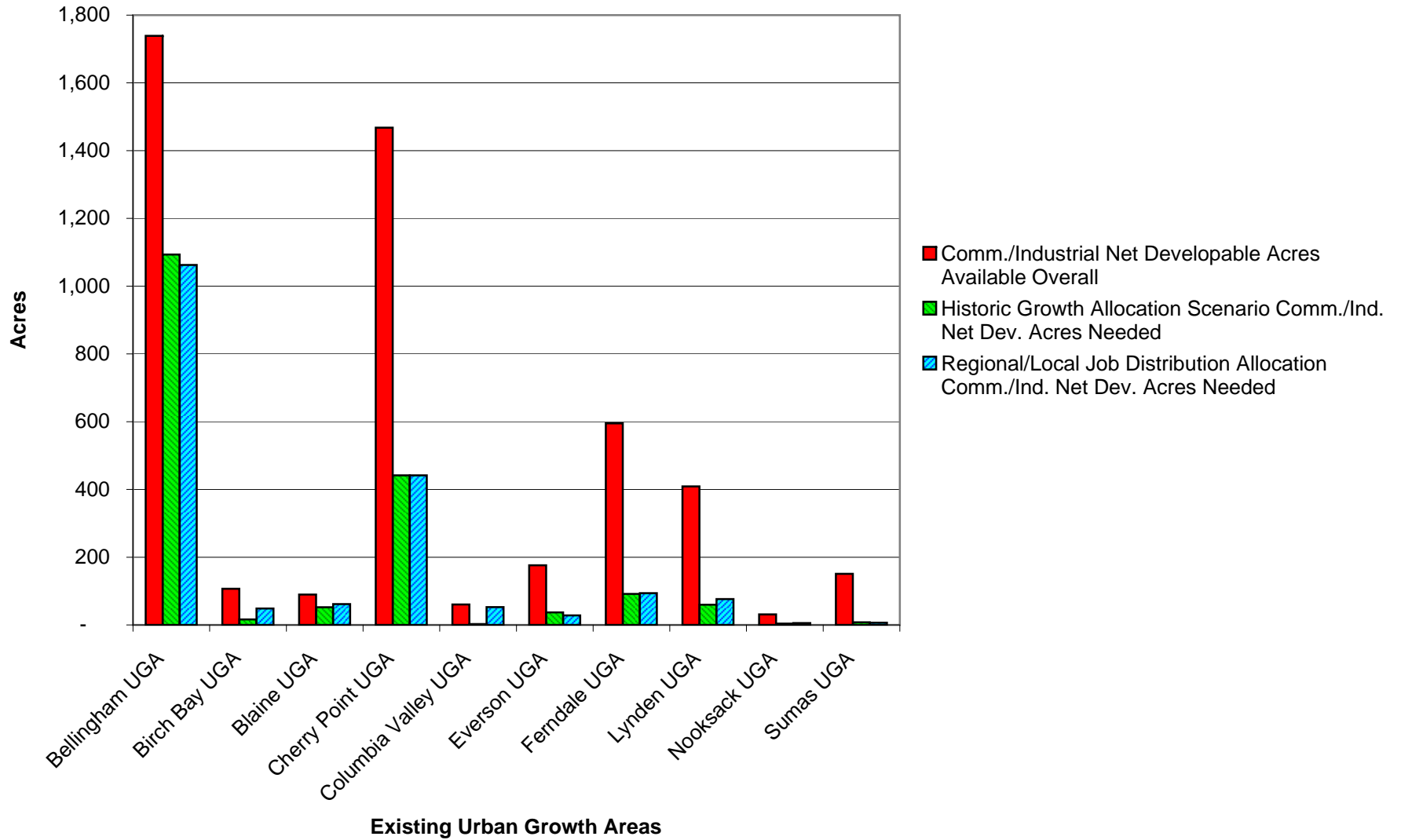
Residential Land Supply - Land Demand Comparison



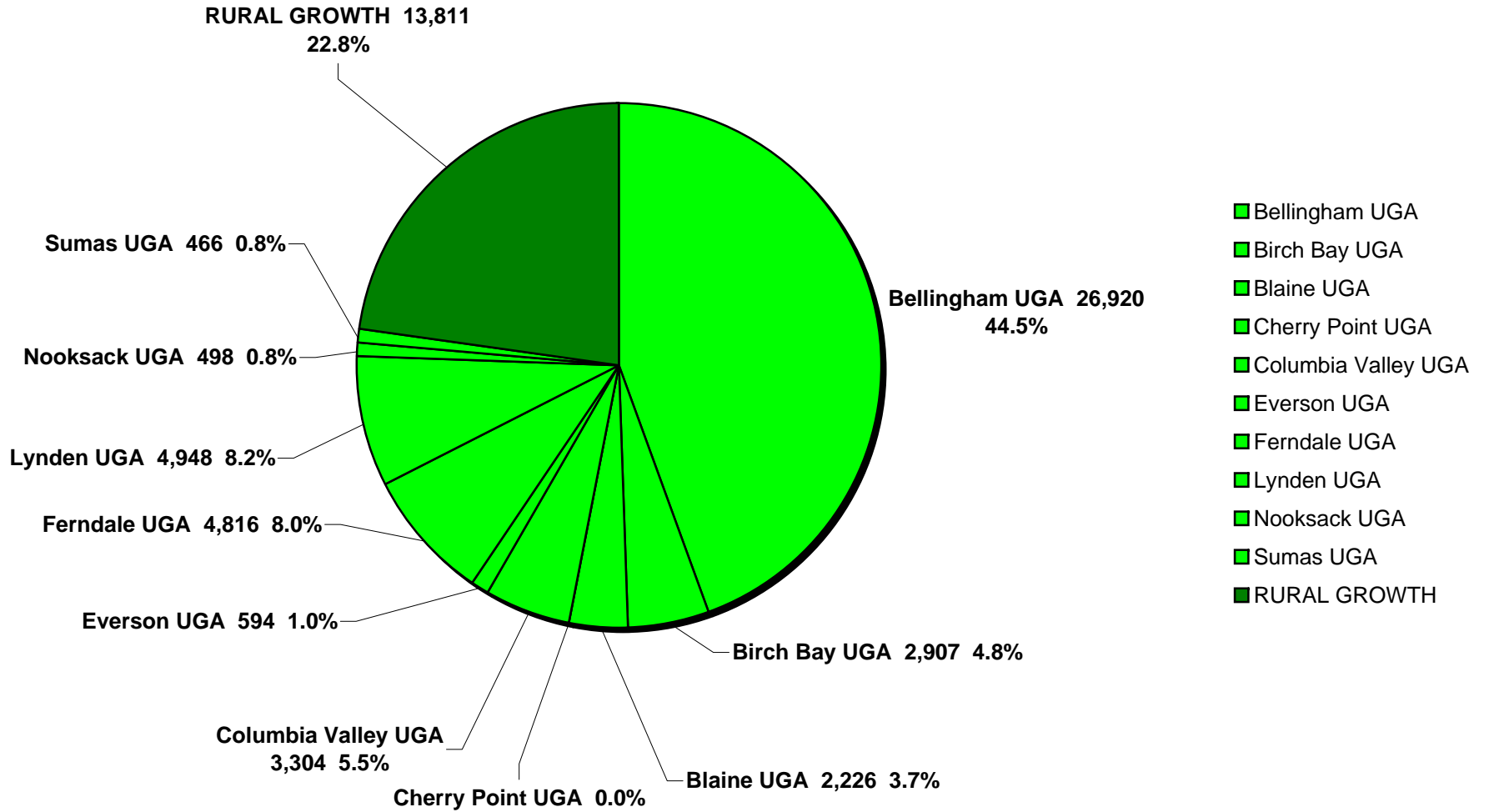
Land Capacity - Employment Growth Allocation Comparison



Commercial / Industrial Land Supply - Land Demand Comparison



Historical Population Allocation



Current Plan Population Allocation

