

Meeting Summary WHATCOM COUNTY GROWTH MANAGEMENT COORDINATING COUNCIL

March 4, 2009

Cornwall Church Commons
4518 Northwest Road
Bellingham, WA
3:00 – 5:00 p.m.

Welcome and Introductions

Jack Louws, Chair, welcomed participants. The following Growth Management Coordinating Council (GMCC) members were present:

Whatcom County

Pete Kremen, County Executive
Sam Crawford, County Council
Seth Fleetwood, County Council

City of Bellingham

Dan Pike, Mayor
Barbara Ryan, City Council

City of Blaine

Bonnie Onyon, Mayor

City of Everson

Absent

City of Ferndale

Gary Jensen, Mayor

City of Lynden

Jack Louws, Mayor

City of Nooksack

Marshall Judy, City Council

City of Sumas

Bob Bromley, Mayor

Minutes

The minutes of February 4, 2009 were approved unanimously.

Hearings Board Time Extension Request

David Stalheim indicated the County had requested a six-month extension to the Growth Management Hearings Board earlier in the week, attaching the cities' letters of support. The timing of when a decision would be made on the time extension is unknown.

EIS Alternatives

David Stalheim described that the County Council had approved the SEPA Alternatives as presented at the hearing before the Planning Commission and County Council in mid-February. The County Council requested some particular information be included related to the natural environment and some land use policies. No alternatives were added.

Regional Planning Policy Discussion

Rebecca Craven presented information about rural growth trends and options to redirecting growth away from rural areas to cities and urban areas, including measures the county could take with respect to rural regulations and measures the cities could take to make urban areas more attractive.

The GMCC members discussed whether there was a philosophical agreement on limiting rural growth? GMCC comments included:

- Another tool to normalize growth would include the County implementing concurrency and adopting impact fees. (Current County proposed transportation and school impact fee approaches were described)
- What is the source of the information about vested rural lots? (Assessor records)
- How much agricultural land is needed for sustainability? (Past County studies have indicated 100,000 acres)
- Bellingham has not necessarily provided for growth inside UGA. Missed opportunity for infill, as well as expansion of UGA.
- Bellingham has an infill housing toolkit. The City is paying the price for rural growth which is clogging city roads. Need a partnership with the County.
- Avoid incremental UGA changes and “growing together” to the border. Keep a sustainable amount of resource lands. Is there a final boundary?
- For Lynden, natural boundaries include Badger Road to the northwest. Eastern and southern boundaries are set.
- Are equal impact fees needed, or a similar approach?
- Bellingham agrees with the idea of limiting rural growth. Also think water resources will limit growth. It is a growing issue.
- Lynden has a water issue it is addressing with the Department of Ecology. Rural growth should have a more realistic allocation than 6% -- more like 14-15%.
- Provide market and regulatory incentives into where we want people to go. Rather than downzone.
- Difficult to do urban villages in established areas than in greenfields.
- Smaller communities like Lynden have a different atmosphere. Larger families; not in the same place as Bellingham. In Lynden only place to densify is Downtown.

- Are UGAs shrinking? When will those proposals be heard? (Likely in May/June on the present schedule)
- Don't make transfer of development rights complicated. Avoid downzones.

City UGA Proposals

David Stalheim presented a memo regarding the level and timing of city proposals. In our current timeframe, it is likely the only input the cities would be able to make is to recommend their population and employment allocations for their communities. If there is a time extension other proposals the cities could make include land capacity analysis adjustments, growth location/boundaries, land use, and topics for reconciliation at a later date. The chair asked if the cities do not make the full proposals, what would be the outcome, and isn't there a public participation requirement? David explained that the County would prepare proposals in that case and they would be part of the hearing process. The hope is to have the extended timeline to allow more city participation.

Other Business

No other business was conducted during this meeting.