

Meeting Summary WHATCOM COUNTY GROWTH MANAGEMENT COORDINATING COUNCIL

April 1, 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

Andy Rowison, City Council

City of Ferndale

Gary Jensen, Mayor

City of Lynden

Jack Louws, Mayor

City of Sumas

Bob Bromley, Mayor

Minutes

The minutes of March 4, 2009, as corrected on March 30, 2009, were approved unanimously.

Community Values Survey

Roger Van Dyken, Whatcom Legacy Project, introduced Adam Davis from Davis, Hibbitts & Midghall who conducted a Whatcom County Values & Beliefs Survey. The questions assess residents' attitudes toward population growth and land use. The survey had the following characteristics:

- Telephone survey of 400 County residents
- Age 18 and older
- Demographically representative of County's population
- Margin of error is +/- 4.9%
- Triangulated research on key issues

The questions focused on Whatcom County's future in 50 years, though the results are informative for current County/City planning efforts.

Results by key questions were detailed, but overall conclusions were:

- Residents value the landscape and location of Whatcom County
- Residents were split as to whether the County will be a better or worse place to live in the next 50 years
- A majority of residents did not think there is plenty of room for growth in the County
- Elements of planning for which residents showed their support were high density growth in cities and existing neighborhoods so less natural space and working farmland will need to be developed in the future
- Trends residents found desirable were:
 - Increased use of public transit, biking, and walking alternatives to the automobile
 - More family-wage jobs
 - Growth concentrated in existing cities while working farmland and forested foothills are left undeveloped
- In terms of who should pay to bring public services like water, sewer, and roads to their property, residents were significantly more likely to think it should be paid for by developers and not be taxpayers
- Demographic differences in the survey were most often found by age, length and type of area of residence, and income

GMCC members asked Adam Davis about how to interpret some of the results in today's context versus 50 years.

Sam Crawford asked based on some of the responses, was there an idea that the County's planning efforts have been more successful than decision-makers had been hearing from individuals? Adam Davis indicated that the results show that planning appears important to respondents in the context of the next 50 years; it is a leap to say those opinions apply to current conditions.

Pete Kremen expressed appreciation for the quality of the study and presentation.

Jack Louws thanked Roger Van Dyken and Adam Davis for the survey presentation. More information is available at the County website.

Urban Growth Area Updates

Each city and county member provided an update on growth allocations and issues relative to their respective UGA.

- Whatcom County – Columbia Valley, Birch Bay, Cherry Point: Seth Fleetwood reported that:
 - Birch Bay – A public meeting was held on March 23rd to review with the community their interests. No conclusions were drawn. However, there was a strong interest in upholding the community plan adopted in 2004.
 - Columbia Valley – The Whatcom County Council voted on March 17th to continue designation of Columbia Valley as an Urban Growth Area and to allocate a future residential population total of 5,000.
 - Cherry Point – County Planning staff are researching the history of the Cherry Point industrial UGA designation. This area was designated under separate GMA authority (see RCW 36.70A.365 and Countywide Planning Policies).
- Bellingham: Tim Stewart, City of Bellingham Planning and Community Development Director, reported a recent City Council vote to support a Countywide Growth Forecast of 234,017 with a City UGA Population based on 44.5% of growth (19,543), and UGA Employment of 18,829. Barbara Ryan reported that the City Council will revisit their action to consider taking a share of population that is consistent with the current County comprehensive plan. Other GMCC members noted a concern with Bellingham's lower population growth that was going in an opposite direction of the small cities, and the potential relationship to rural growth.
- Blaine: Terry Galvin, City of Blaine Community Development Director, provided the City's report. In general, the City has a concern with the speed of the process. In terms of policy issues, Blaine believes that cities and their UGAs should be the focus for population growth as opposed to unincorporated UGAs such as Birch Bay. The City has indicated an interest in retaining areas to the south west and to the central-east as UGA study areas. The City recognizes that some of the UGA land in the south central portion of the UGA may require removal due to a variety of factors including concentrations of critical areas that limit development and difficulty in servicing the areas. The City wants to work with the County on the UGA study areas during a reconciliation process. Seth Fleetwood noted a docket request in the last few years for joint County-City planning in Blaine – what is the reason that did not move forward? Terry indicated a change in County staff and other logistical factors delayed that process.
- Everson: Rollin Harper, Sehome Planning provided the City report. The City preference is to maintain present UGA boundaries as well as the provisional UGA land in the Suitability Analysis Study Area. The City proposes to go with SEPA Alternative Y growth figures as it is the highest projection available and appears reasonable based on City projections.

- Ferndale: Gary Jensen provided a report on the City of Ferndale efforts. The City has indicated in interest in maintaining UGA boundaries in and near I-5 to preserve employment opportunities along the interchanges. The City would like to see its UGA boundaries modified to the south to have all four corners of Slater Avenue. The City may reduce its UGA on the west where topography constrains extension of services. The City is proposing Alternative Y population, but would like a higher employment allocation than provided in the SEPA Alternatives. The City is not interested in annexing the North Bellingham area.
- Lynden: City staff has expressed interest in studying area near Double Ditch Road for suitability for inclusion in the UGA for residential as well as other land for stormwater management purposes. City growth figures are close to SEPA Alternative X.
- Nooksack: Rollin Harper, Sehome Planning provided a report on behalf of the City of Nooksack. The City preference is to maintain present UGA boundaries in the Suitability Analysis Study Area. The City proposes to go with SEPA Alternative Y growth figures as it is the highest projection available and appears reasonable based on City projections.
- Sumas: Rollin Harper, Sehome Planning provided a report on behalf of the City of Sumas. The City preference is to maintain present UGA boundaries in the Suitability Analysis Study Area. The City proposes to go with SEPA Alternative Y growth figures as it is the highest projection available. Based on reviewing jobs per capita, the City would have liked to have more jobs to maintain its current jobs per capita, but it was not in the range provided. If some employment growth is unallocated, the City would be interested in taking more.

Other Business

David Stalheim reported that the Growth Management Hearings Board extended the deadline for the 10-Year UGA Review to December 1, 2009. David began to outline a preliminary schedule:

April 1st	Cities Provide Initial Allocation and UGA Issues to GMCC
April 3 – 14th	Review Internal EIS draft
First Week in May	Draft EIS circulated for public comment
May 31st	City UGA Proposals Due
Mid June	Public and Agency Comments Due on Draft EIS
June – mid July	Analysis of City Proposals
Mid-July to Mid-Sept	Planning Commission Hearings and Deliberation
Mid-September – November	County Council Hearings, Deliberation and Decision
December 1, 2009	GMHB Due Date

Due to lack of time, discussion on the schedule would continue at the next meeting.

No other business was conducted during this meeting.