

# Meeting Summary WHATCOM COUNTY GROWTH MANAGEMENT COORDINATING COUNCIL

**May 6, 2009**

Cornwall Church Commons  
4518 Northwest Road  
Bellingham, WA  
2:00 – 5:00 p.m. (special extended time)

## Welcome and Introductions

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

*Whatcom County*

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 Ferndale*

Gary Jensen, Mayor

*City of Lynden*

Jack Louws, Mayor

*City of Nooksack*

Linda Byulsma, City Council

*City of Sumas*

Bob Bromley, Mayor

## Minutes

The minutes of April 1, 2009, were approved unanimously with the following correction: the discussion of Ferndale’s UGA update should include the following sentence after the discussion of Slater Avenue: “The City of Ferndale has no intention of annexing North Bellingham.”

## Schedule Update

David Stalheim outlined a revised schedule due to the extended Growth Management Hearings Board timeline:

May 8th Draft EIS Released

June 1 Initial UGA Proposals Due to Whatcom County

June 16 Proposed Joint County Council/PC Meeting to hear UGA proposals (special meeting 4 to 6, break, 7 to 9)

June 23 Public Hearing to hear input on UGA proposals before County Council

July 31 County UGA Response and Proposal (county-wide)

Sept. 10 Public Hearing on County UGA proposal before joint County Council/Planning Commission  
*Planning Commission deliberation*

Oct. 8 Planning Commission recommendation on UGA to County Council

Oct. 13 County Council introduction on UGA

Oct. 27 County Council hearing on UGA

*Council deliberation on UGA*

Nov. 24 County Council decision on UGA

## **EIS Findings**

Lisa Grueter, ICF Jones & Stokes, provided an overview of preliminary major findings in the forthcoming EIS due to be released on May 8, 2009. The topics covered included purpose of the EIS as an informational document and findings on:

- Natural Environment: Impervious surface
  
- Built Environment
  - Jobs/housing balance
  - Land Capacity
  - Transportation/  
Air Quality
  - Vehicle miles travelled
  - Congestion & mitigation
  - Capital Facilities
  
- Other: Fiscal

Sam Crawford asked about the traffic findings that Alternative Y the least vehicle miles travelled (VMT), but the most level of service impacts; those findings seem opposite. Andy Gomez, Whatcom Council of Governments, indicated that VMT is a measure of length of trips while level of service is a measure of congestion – can have shorter trips but in locations where the road capacity isn't sufficient.

Dan Pike asked if the fiscal analysis addressed the cost of making transportation facilities fish passable. Lisa Grueter indicated that it was a high level order of magnitude look and did not address that level of detail.

The comment period on the EIS will begin on May 8<sup>th</sup> and continue for 45 days to June 22<sup>nd</sup>. The Final EIS will respond to comments and address a Preferred Alternative, still to be determined through the City proposals and County proposals David outlined in the schedule.

The Power Point presentation will be made available to the GMCC and other interested parties in response to a request by Chair Louws.

## Policy Discussion

The GMCC discussed the following policy questions and gave direction by motion, as follows:

**Policy Question:** How much deference should be given to local proposals for growth allocation?

The GMCC discussed the policy question in light of population and agricultural issues, with the following comments:

- Seth Fleetwood: What is the reason for Bellingham's 38% share of growth? Barbara Ryan replied that the 113,000 population is a floor not a ceiling.
- Jack Louws: Lynden's natural community is to border and Sumas; however, the City promotes balanced, logical, and slow growth, not gobbling up agricultural land. Lynden supports deferral to local proposals.

In 1990's Lynden made the determination to achieve certain densities prior to moving on to next piece. Implement dealers back in downtown. A lot of 5-acre lots around the community will end up as hobby farms.

- Dan Pike: There is a tension between local and regional issues. Policies should be reflective of the Legacy project: Preserve agricultural and resource land. At the same time there's a concern about density in neighborhoods. Policies should address global and local issues.
- Gary Jensen: 125 acres of agricultural land – some is swamp land not agricultural land. Dairy farms are gone; dirt isn't adequate for agriculture. Could see having protection and mitigation. Want a better definition of agriculture. What do you say to the farmer who can't have dairy and the soil isn't good for growing?
- Bonnie Onyon: Each city is putting in a lot of thought about their own area. Should contain growth in own UGA. There must be adequate services. Support the TAG discussion.
- Bob Bromley: Save prime farmland, but only take what you need.
- Barbara Ryan. Think we can agree on the need for a healthy agriculture community. Recognize input received throughout.

The GMCC discussed whether limiting regional issues to agriculture was appropriate, and noted that the policy topic of agriculture would come up later in the policy questions.

*The following motion passed by majority vote: Provide a strong preference to local proposals striving to balance these proposals with regional countywide issues.*

**Policy Question:** Does the overall growth forecast require adjustment?

The GMCC discussed the initial population forecasts received from cities that are slightly higher than the GMCC's original preferred forecast.

*The following motion passed by majority vote: Go with a countywide population of 252,971, instead of 251,490, based on local proposals.*

The GMCC discussed that the local employment requests amount to 33,069, slightly lower than the GMCC recommended 2031 forecast of 33,909 additional employees.

*The following motion passed by majority vote: Go with a countywide employment increase of 33,909 additional employees.*

**Policy Question:** Is the initial pattern of growth distribution as proposed by the various entities the most desirable alternative?

The GMCC discussed the policy question, particularly whether shifting growth from Bellingham to smaller areas was most desirable, with the following comments:

- Sam Crawford: Yes it's desirable, but skeptical if it's practical/will happen. He's concerned with one part of the distribution to Columbia valley – 5,000 population not realistic.
- Dan Pike: There's a difference between a predictive versus a policy exercise. Share the concern about Columbia Valley but don't have solutions.
- Bonnie Onyon: Asked Terry Galvin to comment on the Blaine population number. Terry indicated that Blaine wanted 10,000 in population and a reduction in Birch Bay's population.
- Seth Fleetwood: This topic may be subject to further review based on EIS.

*The following motion passed by majority vote, with Sam Crawford voting no: Bellingham and smaller cities have generally accepted Alternative Y to shift growth from Bellingham to other areas including concentrations of growth in cities.*

The GMCC discussed rural growth distribution.

- Sam Crawford indicated he thinks rural growth is a different topic, and that more incentives are needed in urban areas to get growth where we want it.

*The following motion passed by majority vote, with Sam Crawford voting no: Explore transferring more growth out of rural areas into urban areas.*

**Policy Question:** Should Urban Growth Area expansion or annexations into agricultural lands include mitigation for the loss of agricultural lands?

The GMCC discussed a motion to support the policy "urban growth area expansion or annexations into agricultural lands shall include mitigation for the loss of agricultural lands," but due to concern over the lack of specificity of "mitigation," potential increases to the cost of developing in UGAs, bureaucracy to manage a program, and the lack of TAG discussion, the motion was withdrawn. TAG members were asked to bring back some recommendations.

**Policy Question:** Is the allocation of growth to rural areas reasonable?

The GMCC discussed the policy question with the following comments:

- Dan Pike: 6% rural growth was too low; 14.6% is a better direction but may be high. Want to see Sudden Valley numbers.
- Sam Crawford: Noted that the percentage is somewhat arbitrary.

- Rebecca Craven, County Council staff, stated that the trend is down from the 1990's and that 15% is on the trend line.

*The following motion passed by majority vote: Support a rural growth allocation of 14.6%.*

**Policy Question:** What expectations are there for demonstrating adequate public facilities and services for all urban growth areas as part of this review process?

The GMCC discussed the policy question with the following comments:

- Bonnie Onyon: Have a concern about bearing the costs of updating capital plans.
- Amy Harksell, Lynden Planning Director, posed a question about levels of service – what is the police, fire, and other service level for unincorporated areas? Should there be the same urban standards as for cities?

*The following motion passed by majority vote: Allow for reconciliation of public facility and service issues through the 2011 planning process.*

*The following motion passed by majority vote: Encourage unincorporated UGAs to have urban levels of service like cities.*

David Stalheim indicated the TAG would work on a policy paper based on GMCC recommendations.

## **Other Business**

No other business was conducted during this meeting.