

**Meeting Summary
WHATCOM COUNTY
GROWTH MANAGEMENT COORDINATING COUNCIL**

June 3, 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

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 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 May 6, 2009, were approved unanimously.

Urban Growth Area Review Recommendations

David Stalheim presented the Draft Urban Growth Area (UGA) Review Recommendations Policy Paper based on the May 6th policy discussion, as well as GMCC direction over the last year. Topics include:

- Growth forecasts
- Growth allocation
- Public facilities and services

Ten policies were developed and were described.

Jack Louws asked each member of the GMCC to give input, reflecting that the GMCC was not likely to finalize the paper at the meeting due to concerns that some topics required more thought and more input from the GMCC and more review by the Technical Advisory Group (TAG).

GMCC comments included:

- Bellingham: Dan Pike expressed an overarching concern that the land capacity analysis overestimates capacity and is flawed. This has significant policy implications; it is more than an algebraic analysis. The City has accepted 113,000 in population as a minimum, and is willing to accept more if rural/agricultural growth is reduced. We should use the next two years to “right size” the UGAs. There is too much focus on Columbia Valley and Birch Bay. More growth should go to cities like Blaine. There should be no GMCC decisions until after the Draft Environmental Impact Statement comment period. There is a need for strategies to transfer growth out of the rural areas. Prefer to target lower growth in agricultural areas. The agricultural policy needs to be stronger. Barbara Ryan indicated her agreement with Dan Pike’s comments.
- Sumas: Bob Bromley indicated that Sumas wants to keep its current UGA. He thinks the employment is skewed to Nooksack, Everson, Birch Bay and Columbia Valley. Need more employment in Sumas since it has industrial land. Sumas is “bumped up” against agricultural land – it’s the only place to go. Need to look at productive versus non-productive land.
- Whatcom County – Seth Fleetwood: One part of the discussion needs to look at ways to reduce growth in agricultural lands. There has been no serious attempt to alter land use patterns in the County.
 - David Stalheim noted that the focus of current efforts is on UGAs. The County will be adopting Limited Areas of More Intensive Rural Development (LAMIRDs) later this year. Implementation of measures to address rural growth is not happening this year.
- Blaine: Bonnie Onyon stated that Blaine has asked for 8.9% population share and an employment growth of 5,942. The City has industrial areas and has interested businesses. Methods should account for local community character. Need more accountability in unincorporated UGAs – Birch Bay. If UGAs are reduced, there will be more growth in rural areas. She wondered what type of services will be provided in unincorporated areas.
- Everson: Andy Rowson said from the Everson perspective, there should be a local focus in this process. Everson is looking at shifting UGAs to the most logical places. He doesn’t think reducing UGAs will preserve agriculture. Land capacity analysis results should be looked at as a range. The original GMCC role was to be broad, but then the focus became about the numbers. He would like a broader conversation.
- Ferndale: Gary Jensen read from a letter he had provided to the GMCC members, focusing on bulleted items in the letter, including the following:
 - Are the cities comfortable with the arithmetic inputs used to determine the land capacity analysis?
 - Should the County use city development standards for all projects within their UGA?

- Should the County revise their development standards to force additional growth into the cities? And if so, what steps can they take?
 - What are the risks associated with keeping the existing UGA boundaries unchanged?
 - What are the risks associated with enlarging the UGA boundaries?
 - Should the County be required to mitigate for development permitted on Ag land? And if so, how?
 - What mechanisms can be put into place to monitor urban/rural growth and revise UGA boundaries on an on-going basis?
 - How can the County's concept of "short-term" and "long-term" UGA planning areas be modified or utilized to assure appropriate annexation, provision for public infrastructure, and acceptable urban densities?
 - Should the County preclude large scale residential and/or industrial development in the County where public infrastructure is unavailable?
- Nooksack: Marshall Judy indicated that Nooksack would be willing to shift about 100 jobs to Sumas.
 - Whatcom County – Sam Crawford: Lakeway, Sunset, Meridian, and Northwest Drive are the four worst corridors to get into Bellingham.
 - Lynden: Jack Louws wanted to ensure that the land capacity analysis reflects Lynden's work. Agricultural issues are of the greatest importance. He wants to ensure the TAG goes through all the UGA issues.

Jack Louws asked that David Stalheim roll through the policy issues and get comments and direction from the GMCC.

1 Establish a county-wide growth forecast for Whatcom County that represents the "most likely" expectation for growth during the planning period.

There appeared to be general agreement and no further comments on this policy.

2 Adopt a county-wide population forecast of 252,971 (61,971 additional people over 2008 estimated population) and a county-wide employment forecast of 33,909 of additional employment growth.

The GMCC agreed that the employment figure should be changed to 34,608 to maintain a 49% labor force ratio.

Comments on the Growth Allocation numbers included:

- Bellingham: Dan Pike supports more growth to Blaine as opposed to Birch Bay.
- Blaine: Bonnie Onyon asked if increasing Blaine to 8.9% would mean reducing another jurisdiction's population? She indicated that Blaine's preferred employment number is 5,942 – another 1,000 jobs.

- David Stalheim: Indicated the County is using the EIS range as a guide and wants to avoid huge shifts to avoid causing traffic problems. He explained that Birch Bay’s population figure is based on the Birch Bay community plan. As staff they did not want to insert a number different than the community plan without elected official direction.
- Terry Galvin: Indicated that perhaps Birch Bay UGA could have a “core” and a future growth area.
- Ferndale: Gary Jensen noted Ferndale’s request is for 4,747 employees – the City has three interchanges, and historic trends will change.
- Sumas: Bob Bromley stated that Sumas has infrastructure and shovel-ready industrial areas. Other unincorporated areas don’t have that. Need a re-look at the employment numbers.

3 Recognize input received throughout the public process by Whatcom County and cities and provide strong preference to local proposals while addressing the regional issues.

There appeared to be general agreement and no further comments on this policy.

4 Support the initial pattern of growth distribution as the most desirable alternative, including a concentration of that growth into cities.

Comments included:

- Ferndale: Gary Jensen stated this is a big one. How to satisfy everyone?
- Lynden: Jack Louws said this policy needs to reflect initial concerns.
- Bellingham: Barbara Ryan indicated the paper needed to show the results of the statistically valid survey and local public processes.

5 Explore ways to transfer more growth out of rural areas.

Comments included:

- Everson: Andy Rowson asked who’s responsible for implementing the policy?
- The GMCC then discussed if the policy should start with “Urge the County to explore...”
- Lynden: Jack Louws said the rural growth is important – can’t kick it out of equation.
- David Stalheim discussed that the original approach to the GMCC was to start with the broader discussion with Countywide Planning Policies, but due to the Hearings Board case, the process flipped to address the details of the UGAs first.

6 Support the proposed allocation of rural growth at approximately 15% as an achievable rural growth rate.

Comments included:

- The GMCC discussed the rural growth numbers with and without Sudden Valley. Between 1990 and 2008 the rural share of County population growth was 22.8%, but without Sudden Valley was 18.2%. Between 2000 and 2008, the rural share of County population growth was 19.7%, but without Sudden Valley was 12.9%.
- Dan Pike suggested that the rural growth target be “split” to have a number for rural lands excluding Sudden Valley and a number just for Sudden Valley. A lot of Sudden Valley growth was caused by extension of a sewer line plus the economy. He proposed 10% for general rural growth and 4.6% for Sudden Valley.
- Barbara Ryan noted the success in reducing growth in Sudden Valley by buying lots.
- Andy Rowson suggested that the policy read 15% or less.
- Jack Louws indicated that 14.6% is fine as a realistic goal based on a trend line.

7 Utilize a consistent methodology for determining the capacity of Urban Growth Areas using assumptions meant to be reasonable estimates of densities to expect over the long-term planning period.

See general comments above before Policy 1.

8 Where public facility and service plans are not consistent with the planning horizon, UGA boundary or growth forecasts, allow for reconciliation of the public facility and service gaps as part of the comprehensive plan and development regulation review required in 2011.

There appeared to be general agreement and no further comments on this policy.

9 Encourage that unincorporated Urban Growth Areas have urban levels of service approximating city standards.

Comments included:

- Andy Rowson asked what the policy meant – can someone not develop without sewer?
- David Stalheim explained that rural densities apply until the City annexes and provides urban services. For example in Bellingham the default density is 1 unit per 10 acres without urban services. In other UGAs it is 1 unit per 5 acres. The County is considering changing it to 1/10 acres to avoid development patterns that are hard to serve later on.
- Terry Galvin asked if urban service extension only with annexation was a common policy. GMCC members generally affirmed that.
- Jack Louws asked that the policy language be clarified.

10 Ensure that Whatcom County has measures in place to preclude urban levels of development before urban services and facilities are in place to serve that development.

There were no further comments on this policy.

General direction from the GMCC was to go back to the TAG.

The following motion passed by majority vote: The TAG should work cooperatively to reach a consensus document and bring it back to the GMCC for the first meeting in July.

Future of GMCC

David Stalheim explained the original approach was to let the GMCC have a break in July/August while the TAG worked on Countywide Planning Policies, bringing that back for the GMCC meeting in September. However, with the GMCC direction on the UGA Review policies, the TAG would have to insert meetings in June in order to have policy recommendations for the GMCC in July. During June the cities and County are also working on their UGA proposals for the public meetings. In July the County will be putting together its proposals. The next regular GMCC meeting would occur on July 1, 2009.

Other Business

No other business was conducted during this meeting.

Preliminary Draft