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Technical Advisory Group:
Planning Directors from each city, county, tribes, Port of Bellingham and Council of Governments meet regularly to provide recommendations to the Coordinating Council.

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January 14, 2009

TO: Growth Management Coordinating Council
FROM: Technical Advisory Group
RE: Land Capacity Methodology

Update on Technical Work: Staff from the cities and county have been hard at work completing the land capacity analysis of each of the urban growth areas since the GMCC meeting on December 3rd and the County Council hearing on December 9th. Unfortunately, we are still not done with the initial analysis for public review. We are very close, but it is important for staff to get the work done right before publication and review. Our goal is to now have this available for the February 4th GMCC meeting.

Methodology Issues: As city and county staff worked to complete the land capacity analysis, some issues with the methodology that was adopted in December by the GMCC came up. The Technical Advisory Group met last week and believe changes to the methodology in some specific areas as outlined on the attached pages are warranted. No action is requested at this time; this is only informational. We do anticipate that there may be more issues that come up as we complete the methodology.

Land Capacity Methodology Issues

1. Underutilized for Commercial/Industrial

- Issue: The criteria for defining underutilized commercial or industrial property were based on whether the improvement (building) value was less than the land value. In some circumstances, uses were considered underutilized although redevelopment was unlikely. The most obvious examples found were gas stations. If the use was put into the land capacity analysis as underutilized, then there would be an assumption that additional development of the property and employment would occur in the next twenty years.
- Proposal: Cities and county can identify gas stations as fully developed if it appears that redevelopment is unlikely. For other uses, the city would identify the use and the existing floor area would be removed from the land supply potential.

2. Vacant commercial or industrial lots

- Issue: This issue is similar to the item above. We have found situations where parking lots or storm ponds are located on separate parcels in commercial or industrial areas are coded as vacant, but are required for an adjoining land use.
- Proposal: We would consider such uses as fully developed if associated with current use and required by code. We would consider these types of uses as underutilized if not associated with a current use. For example, a parking lot that is on a separate parcel that is required by ordinance would be considered as fully developed; a parking lot on a separate parcel that is NOT required by ordinance, such as parking lots in downtown Bellingham, would be considered as underutilized. Classifying a parcel as underutilized will provide a 25% market factor for commercial uses, versus a 15% market factor for vacant lots.

3. Underutilized single family residential property.

- Issue: The methodology is meant to identify those large parcels that have the potential to be re-divided and provide for additional residential capacity. The methodology provided for two options on underutilized residential property. The two options were whether the property was two or three times the underlying minimum lot size requirements. In reviewing the initial results, it is clear that parcels just two times the underlying lot size minimum is a threshold which will have inaccurate conclusions.
- Proposal: Cities will review the initial results at two times the underlying minimum lot size, and can adjust parcel status up to three times the underlying minimum lot size or density assumption. The city will show the deviation and provide justification. The city might consider it on a parcel by parcel basis, by neighborhood or over the entire city.

4. Floodplain areas

- Issue: The methodology took out floodways, but not floodplains from the inventory of available land. Most jurisdictions allow development and land divisions within the floodplain area. In some areas, the base flood elevation significantly reduces development potential. Including the floodplain areas within the land supply might also encourage development of these areas as land supply is consumed within the urban area.
- Proposal: Where base flood elevation is over 2, then the city could propose removal of area from land supply to not encourage development in floodplain areas. Where regulations don't allow fill, and fill is required for development (industrial), then these areas should also be taken out of development potential.

5. Small pieces affected by Critical Areas:

- Issue: Reviewing the results has identified situations where the remnant piece left after application of the critical areas regulations fragments parcels.
- Proposal: Cities can identify property that might not be readily developable due to access and fragmentation issues. City would provide documentation for why to take parcel out of inventory.

6. Floor Area for Future Commercial or Industrial Employment

- Issue: For determining the future floor area necessary to accommodate employment, the methodology uses the past five years as a snapshot to identify the floor area for future employment. In some jurisdictions, the five year timeline is too short a time period to get a good history and forecast for the future.
- Proposal: Cities provided with alternative approaches, including providing a history more than five years, use any adopted code or plan goals, or standard industry practices. Cities to provide justification and documentation.