

**WHATCOM COUNTY
PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT SERVICES**

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M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Growth Management Coordinating Council
FROM: David Stalheim, Director
DATE: January 30, 2009
RE: Initial Land Capacity Analysis

Whatcom County Planning and Development Services staff has completed the *initial* analysis of land capacity of the ten urban growth areas in Whatcom County. The summary of those results are attached to this memorandum.

First, I want to thank all of the city and county staff that have worked extremely hard on this effort. County and city GIS staff and planners contributed numerous hours reviewing and checking parcel and other data used to create the baseline information in this analysis. It is my understanding that this may be the first time in Whatcom County where a consistent and coordinated approach to urban growth area review has been completed. We would not have been able to get to this point without the cooperation of everyone.

The land capacity analysis includes a review of land supply and land demand. *Land supply* is broken out in the tables between existing city limits and the unincorporated portions of the current urban growth area designation. The surplus or shortfall is based on the combination of both the city and unincorporated urban growth area designation.

Land demand is based on the two growth allocation alternatives outlined in the Phase I allocation memo prepared by Berk and Associates dated January 13, 2009. These two allocation alternatives use the Growth Management Coordinating Council's recommendation of a total Whatcom County population forecast of 251,490¹ and employment forecast of an additional 33,909 employees.

This initial land capacity analysis is not a finished product. There are issues that both county and city staff know require review before we provide this information as a finished product. The information that is provided does provide a baseline for the EIS alternatives and policy discussions that will now ensue in the next phase of this project.

¹ For purposes of review under the State Environmental Policy Act, the planning directors have recommended that we study the OFM "most likely" population growth forecast in Whatcom County of 258,448, with a corresponding employment forecast of 37,194.

The land capacity analysis is based on the *methodology* presented to the Whatcom County Council after recommendation from the Growth Management Coordinating Council. At the last Growth Management Coordinating Council meeting, we presented additional issues with the methodology that we incorporated into this analysis. Having now had a chance to briefly look at the results, additional review and attention needs to be paid to the following:

- ◆ Residential densities – Whatcom County used the “planned densities” of the underlying zoning for this analysis. The methodology allows some flexibility or interpretation in how to assign densities.
 - A concern raised by some cities is that the planned densities are not the “achieved densities” that cities have been experiencing. We have begun to assemble the achieved densities information and this can be used to later amend the assumed densities within the land capacity analysis. County staff has suggested that cities make any proposed adjustments to assumed densities to the county in the next phase of this review.
 - For context, please note that Whatcom County just recently addressed the issue of achieved versus planned densities in the Bellingham Urban Growth Area case. The conclusion of the Western Washington Growth Management Hearings Board affirms that the UGA can be based on the prospective planning aspect, rather than relatively low density. The difference between planned densities and achieved densities is a discussion between the county and cities that should occur in the next phase of the project.
 - Some zoning districts are difficult to determine what the planned densities are. We have asked city staff to review the assumptions in the technical analysis and provide additional documentation that the county can use.
 - The county used urban level densities unless there was a specific growth management exception that authorized lower densities. Whatcom County has an order from the Growth Management Hearings Board that densities less than four (4) units per acre are not urban densities. Within some urban growth areas, there are land use designations of one (1) unit per five (5) acres. This is a rural density not supported by our order. However, in sensitive watersheds, we have been provided an exception for lower densities. Thus, for those areas where we have assumed four (4) units per acre but the city has a Growth Management justification, Whatcom County needs a proposal that can be verified as part of the review process.
- ◆ Partially developed residential property – The methodology may be overestimating redevelopment of partially utilized residential property. More analysis is needed to determine a fair and consistent manner in which to analyze the ability to redevelop partially used property.
- ◆ Infrastructure subtraction – Additional review and confirmation of the amount of area that is set aside for roads, stormwater and public infrastructure may be necessary. This can affect land supply fairly significantly, so having good recent data is needed to provide documentation for this subtraction.

- ◆ Commercial and Industrial Land Demand – generalized assumptions were needed to complete the analysis if additional data from the cities was not available. Some of these assumptions change the land supply conclusions. We would ask that cities review:
 - The floor area ratio for commercial, industrial and retail property. This is the ratio of how much floor area to property is required to accommodate employment. This figure can greatly affect conclusions, so review of that number is warranted.
 - We would encourage cities to provide economic development elements or strategies that would provide the documentation necessary for additional land supply for commercial and industrial lands.

Based on the results, the following are my *initial observations* regarding the size of the urban growth areas:

- ◆ Based on the initial allocation of population to various urban growth areas, some of these areas appear to be oversized. In particular, Blaine and Ferndale urban growth areas appear to be of initial concern. Adjustments to land demand assumptions and/or population allocations would change the results.
- ◆ There appears to be sufficient overall capacity to accommodate future employment in the county. Attention needs to be paid to whether or not there is the right mix of land available for the various employment sectors. For example, while the conclusions might show a surplus of land for overall employment, when you look into the details there may be insufficient land for industrial employment. Additional review in these various sectors are necessary before reaching any conclusions about land supply for employment.

Please review the results of the land capacity analysis as getting to conclusion regarding the first phase of technical review of the urban growth areas in Whatcom County. We are now ready to proceed to the policy discussion based on these initial results.

If you have any questions about the methodology or results, please feel free to contact either myself, your respective planner, or Gary Davis on our staff.

Table 1. Comparison: Population Growth Accommodated and Projected - Phase I Allocation using GMCC Recommended Population Forecast of 251,490 (see Exhibit 4 of 1-13-09 Phase I Allocation Memo)

UGA	Population Growth Accommodated on Net Developable Acres			Historic Growth Allocation Scenario		Current Policy Based Allocation Scenario	
	City	Unincorporated	Overall	Projected Population Growth	Surplus (Shortfall) in Population	Projected Population Growth	Surplus (Shortfall) in Population
Bellingham UGA	20,578	11,665	32,242	26,920	5,322	31,101	1,141
Birch Bay UGA	-	7,510	7,510	2,907	4,603	4,545	2,965
Blaine UGA	10,857	11,863	22,720	2,226	20,494	2,809	19,911
Cherry Point UGA							
Columbia Valley UGA	-	3,079	3,079	3,304	(225)	2,229	850
Everson UGA	1,310	1,400	2,711	594	2,117	1,471	1,240
Ferndale UGA	9,981	10,884	20,864	4,816	16,048	6,562	14,302
Lynden UGA	2,249	2,307	4,557	4,948	(391)	6,480	(1,923)
Nooksack UGA	889	740	1,629	498	1,131	876	753
Sumas UGA	908	833	1,740	466	1,274	599	1,141
TOTAL URBAN GROWTH	46,771	50,280	97,052	46,679	50,373	56,672	40,380
RURAL GROWTH				13,811		3,818	
TOTAL POPULATION GROWTH				60,490		60,490	

Table 2. Comparison: Employment Growth Accommodated and Projected - Phase I Allocation using GMCC Recommended Employment Forecast of 33,909 (see Exhibit 9 of 1-13-09 Phase I Allocation Memo)

UGA	Employment Growth Accommodated on Net Developable Acres			Historic Growth Allocation Scenario		Regional/Local Job Distribution Allocation	
	City	Unincorporated	Overall	Employment Growth Projected	Surplus (Shortfall) in Employees	Employment Growth Projected	Surplus (Shortfall) in Employees
Bellingham UGA	17,754	8,864	26,617	21,714	4,903	21,188	5,429
Birch Bay UGA	-	1,741	1,741	182	1,559	739	1,002
Blaine UGA	2,020	-	2,020	1,370	650	1,527	493
Cherry Point UGA	-	2,046	2,046	630	1,416	542	1,504
Columbia Valley UGA	-	963	963	39	924	840	123
Everson UGA	1,047	1,495	2,542	293	2,249	151	2,391
Ferndale UGA	6,099	5,193	11,292	2,603	8,689	2,762	8,530
Lynden UGA	6,312	2,381	8,693	2,084	6,609	2,402	6,291
Nooksack UGA	357	292	649	97	552	126	523
Sumas UGA	2,302	387	2,689	136	2,553	118	2,571
TOTAL URBAN GROWTH	35,890	23,361	59,252	29,148	30,104	30,395	28,857
Rural Employment Growth				4,761		3,514	
TOTAL COUNTY EMPLOYMENT				33,909		33,909	

Table 3. Comparison: Residential Net Developable Acres Available and Needed - Phase I Allocation using GMCC Recommended Population Forecast of 251,490 (see Exhibit 4 of 1-13-09 Phase I Allocation Memo)

UGA	Residential Net Developable Acres Available			Historic Growth Allocation Scenario		Current Policy Based Allocation Scenario	
	City	Unincorporated	Overall	Residential Net Dev. Acres Needed	Surplus (Shortfall) in Acres	Residential Net Dev. Acres Needed	Surplus (Shortfall) in Acres
Bellingham UGA	937	669	1,606	1,277	329	1,535	71
Birch Bay UGA	-	825	825	381	444	539	286
Blaine UGA	686	1,103	1,789	(122)	1,911	(67)	1,857
Cherry Point UGA							
Columbia Valley UGA	-	337	337	361	(24)	246	91
Everson UGA	85	126	211	47	164	115	96
Ferndale UGA	349	1,102	1,451	366	1,085	484	967
Lynden UGA	219	107	325	348	(23)	438	(113)
Nooksack UGA	51	54	104	22	82	50	55
Sumas UGA	78	50	128	47	81	55	73
TOTAL URBAN GROWTH	2,405	4,371	6,776	2,727	4,049	3,395	3,381

Table 4. Comparison: Comm./Ind. Net Developable Acres Available and Needed - Phase I Allocation using Current Job Distribution Allocation Scenario (see Exhibit 9 of 1-13-09 Phase I Allocation Memo)

UGA	Comm./Industrial Net Developable Acres Available			Historic Growth Allocation Scenario		Regional/Local Job Distribution Allocation	
	City	Unincorporated	Overall	Comm./Ind. Net Dev. Acres Needed	Surplus (Shortfall) in Acres	Comm./Ind. Net Dev. Acres Needed	Surplus (Shortfall) in Acres
Bellingham UGA	939	800	1,739	1,093	646	1,063	676
Birch Bay UGA	-	107	107	16	90	49	58
Blaine UGA	90	-	90	52	37	61	28
Cherry Point UGA	-	1,468	1,468	442	1,026	442	1,026
Columbia Valley UGA	-	61	61	2	58	53	8
Everson UGA	50	126	176	37	139	28	148
Ferndale UGA	340	255	595	92	503	94	501
Lynden UGA	276	133	409	60	349	77	333
Nooksack UGA	17	14	31	4	27	5	26
Sumas UGA	132	19	151	8	143	7	144
TOTAL	1,845	2,981	4,826	1,806	3,020	1,878	2,948