

**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: October 29, 2008  
RE: GMCC Expectations and Schedule

This upcoming meeting of the Growth Management Coordinating Council will be the fourth meeting of the city and county elected officials regarding growth management issues. Planning staff of the cities and county have also met on numerous occasions and we have received the first round of public input through our public vision workshops and letters. Some people have asked "Who is this Growth Management Coordinating Council" and "What is their authority?" Others have asked for clear expectations for the meetings so that they can understand their role at the Coordinating Council versus their role representing their jurisdiction.

As a result of these questions, it is important for us to step back and review our mission and schedule, making any adjustments as necessary to ensure that we stay on track and focused in getting our collective work accomplished. The following is intended to help the Coordinating Council in this effort.

**PURPOSE OF GROWTH MANAGEMENT COORDINATING COUNCIL**

Planning staff have come up with the following summary of the function of the Growth Management Coordinating Council. We have included it at the bottom of the agenda and would intend to continue doing that to remind the Council and the public as to the role of the Council.

*The purpose of the Growth Management Coordinating Council is to guide the development and adoption of a coordinated management strategy among all jurisdictions in Whatcom County that addresses growth and development over the next 20 years. While the recommendations of this Council are not binding on the individual jurisdictions, they provide a common basis and understanding that can be agreed to by the County and Cities.*

**INITIAL WORK FOCUS OF THE COORDINATING COUNCIL**

At the first meeting, the Council adopted operating procedures that included the following initial focus of the Council:

1. REVIEW AND UPDATE OF THE VISION FOR FUTURE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE REGION.
2. REVIEW AND UPDATE OF THE COUNTY-WIDE PLANNING POLICIES THAT FORM THE FRAMEWORK FOR REVIEW AND AMENDMENT OF CITY AND COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLANS.
3. REVIEW OF COUNTY POPULATION FORECASTS AND WAYS TO IMPLEMENT URBAN GROWTH AREAS.

### **CONDUIT WITH RESPECTIVE JURISDICTIONS**

While the work plan and timeframe is compressed, it is vital that the Coordinating Council allow for sufficient time for consultation with each respective jurisdiction. Future meetings of the Coordinating Council will be set up to 1) initiate the dialogue amongst the jurisdictions; 2) allow time for the representative to confer with their respective jurisdiction and staff; and 3) report back to the Coordinating Council and provide a recommendation. This process will enable better dialogue, allow for more involvement at the local level, and allow for the public to provide input after the issue has been introduced.

For example, at this meeting, we will present the draft methodologies for allocation of population and employment and land capacity analysis, but will wait until the next meeting for a recommendation to be sent forth to the Whatcom County Council for their consideration. In between meetings, we will meet with the Whatcom County Council to receive their initial input prior to the Coordinating Council finishing their recommendation.

### **WHATCOM COUNTY REQUIREMENTS**

Whatcom County is required to designate urban growth areas (RCW 36.70A.110) and is required to review urban growth areas (UGAs) every ten years pursuant to RCW 36.70A.130(3). While cities are not required to designate urban growth areas, they are a critical partner in this effort as cities are the units of local government most appropriate to provide urban governmental services (see RCW 36.70A.110(4)). The Growth Management Act also expects that the county consult with the city and each city usually proposes the location of an urban growth area. It is the county, however, that is found out of compliance with the Growth Management Act for failure to review urban growth areas as required by the Act.

Whatcom County's interest in meeting the requirements of the Growth Management Act are very substantial. Because the County has been found out of compliance with the Act, the County is not eligible for two grant funding sources: Centennial Clean Water funds and Public Works Trust funds. In addition, other grant fund sources also consider whether or not the jurisdiction is compliant with GMA. A recent \$1 million application to the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program for the second phase of Lily Point acquisition had our application moved from 5<sup>th</sup> place in the state to 9<sup>th</sup> place because we lost grant scoring points due to non-compliance with GMA. This lower ranking will likely cause the county to fall below the funding cutoff for this program.

Since Whatcom County is required to take action regarding urban growth areas, we are also considered the lead agency for environmental review required by the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA). As a result, the process for review of the urban growth areas must also require the county to comply with SEPA before actions are taken. Whatcom County is anticipating that the UGA process we are now undertaking will require completion of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), and we are working on a scope of work to accomplish this effort.

## **URBAN GROWTH AREA REVIEW**

The Growth Management Act requirements for Urban Growth area review are outlined in RCW 36.70A.130(3). Those steps, which require both county and city participation, include the following:

- The review should occur at least every ten years (originally due in 2007; date is now June 30, 2009).
- Review the densities permitted within both the incorporated and unincorporated portions of the urban growth area.
- Cities shall review the densities permitted within its boundaries.
- Review the extent to which the urban growth occurring within the county has located within each city and the unincorporated portions of the urban growth areas.
- The county comprehensive plan designating urban growth areas, and the densities permitted in the urban growth areas by the plans of the county and each city, shall be revised to accommodate the urban growth projected to occur in the county for the succeeding twenty-year period.

## **REVISED SCHEDULE**

The consultant and County staff team has conducted visioning workshops (results available under separate cover), distributed questionnaires (results pending), and met with the Technical Advisory Group and Growth Management Coordinating Council on a variety of topics. Through the Technical Advisory Group, cities have indicated a desire to obtain more information such as land supply before working with the project team to develop conceptual regional growth alternatives. Based on this feedback, the consultant team and county planning staff have proposed to reallocate our Phase I resources to support the decision making process.

Preliminarily, our specific recommendation is to shift the sequence of tasks to start on several tasks that were identified to begin early next year, including land supply and demand analysis, a technical population/employment allocation (to be followed by a policy level allocation), initiation of SEPA environmental analysis, and development of capital facility information. Under this approach, the development of regional conceptual alternatives would occur in January/February. We anticipate a greater effort in outreach to all county regions by holding six workshops in each of the Urban Growth Area locations to create alternatives that can be further studied in the SEPA and planning process. The SEPA analysis will allow the County and cities to explore different amounts and/or locations for growth.

The benefit of this approach is to provide additional information and analysis to the cities and citizens earlier in the review process, and to focus public outreach in more communities. This approach will allow the development of regional growth alternatives that can be the basis for planning and environmental study.

Flowcharts and detailed schedules are attached for further information, showing the immediate UGA review process and the overall Whatcom 2031 process.

## KEY CHALLENGES

There are a variety of policy and technical/procedural challenges facing the County and partner cities, including:

### *Policy Issues and Challenges*

- Countywide growth number and growth allocation and their effect on:
  - Infill v. UGA expansion options
  - Rural vested lots and resource lands
- Ability to provide services
  - Tiering or phasing of services
  - Level of detail of planning possible given uncertainty of growth allocation and location
- Level of detail of planning with UGA review v. full plan update by 2011

### *Technical and Process Challenges*

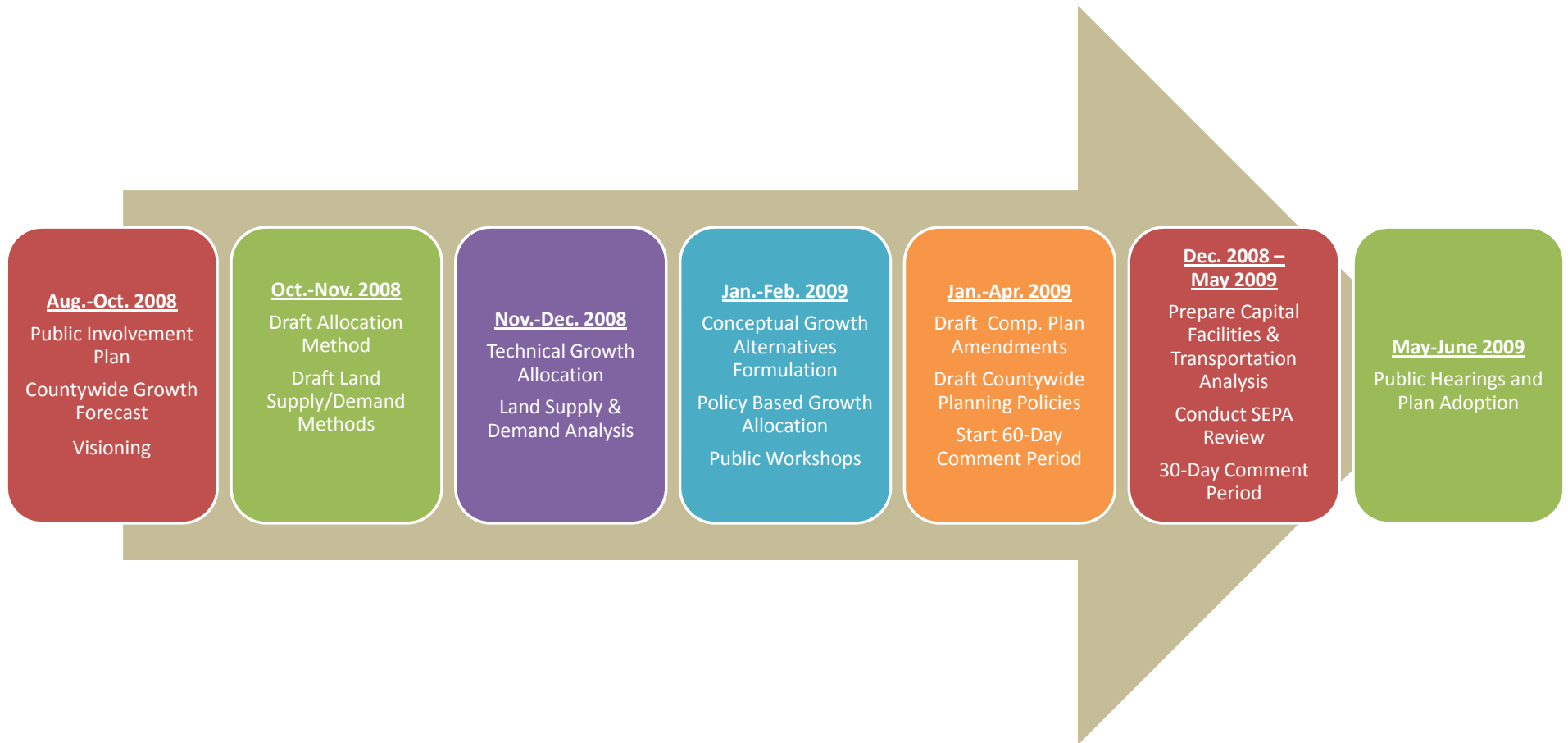
- Alignment of cities and County on the process to reach agreement on growth allocations, growth locations, and Countywide Planning Policies
- Movement from a technical growth allocation to policy-based allocation – will require completion in two months to develop conceptual alternatives
- Availability of data – e.g. service providers, status of Council of Governments transportation model, etc.
- Need to ensure diverse and direct communication to affected areas in public outreach in short period of time

A key challenge that we see is to ensure that stakeholders, particularly the cities, are in agreement on the planning process and availability of information, while meeting the established schedule. With the proposed change, we believe that we will be able to promote a more efficient use of resource and decision-making process.

In general, in order to meet the Growth Management Hearings Board deadline of June 2009, a key challenge will be to continue make decisions and move forward while information is evolving and moving from a more general to more detailed state. For example, we will be establishing UGA boundaries concurrent with decisions on city and County infill programs and the availability of rural vested lots. Similarly, we will be conducting capital facility planning for UGAs while the land capacity and future growth scenarios are being evaluated. This approach is workable but requires a strategic understanding of the issues and agreement on the process. The need to provide a process supported by the County and cities to address growth and Countywide Planning Policies, the availability of data, and the need to focus outreach attention to more areas of the county in a short period of time presents significant procedural and policy challenges. We are confident that this issue can be addressed in a very positive and successful manner and look forward to working with you to set the stage for the next several months. We believe that the first step of reallocating Phase I resources is an essential part of this process.

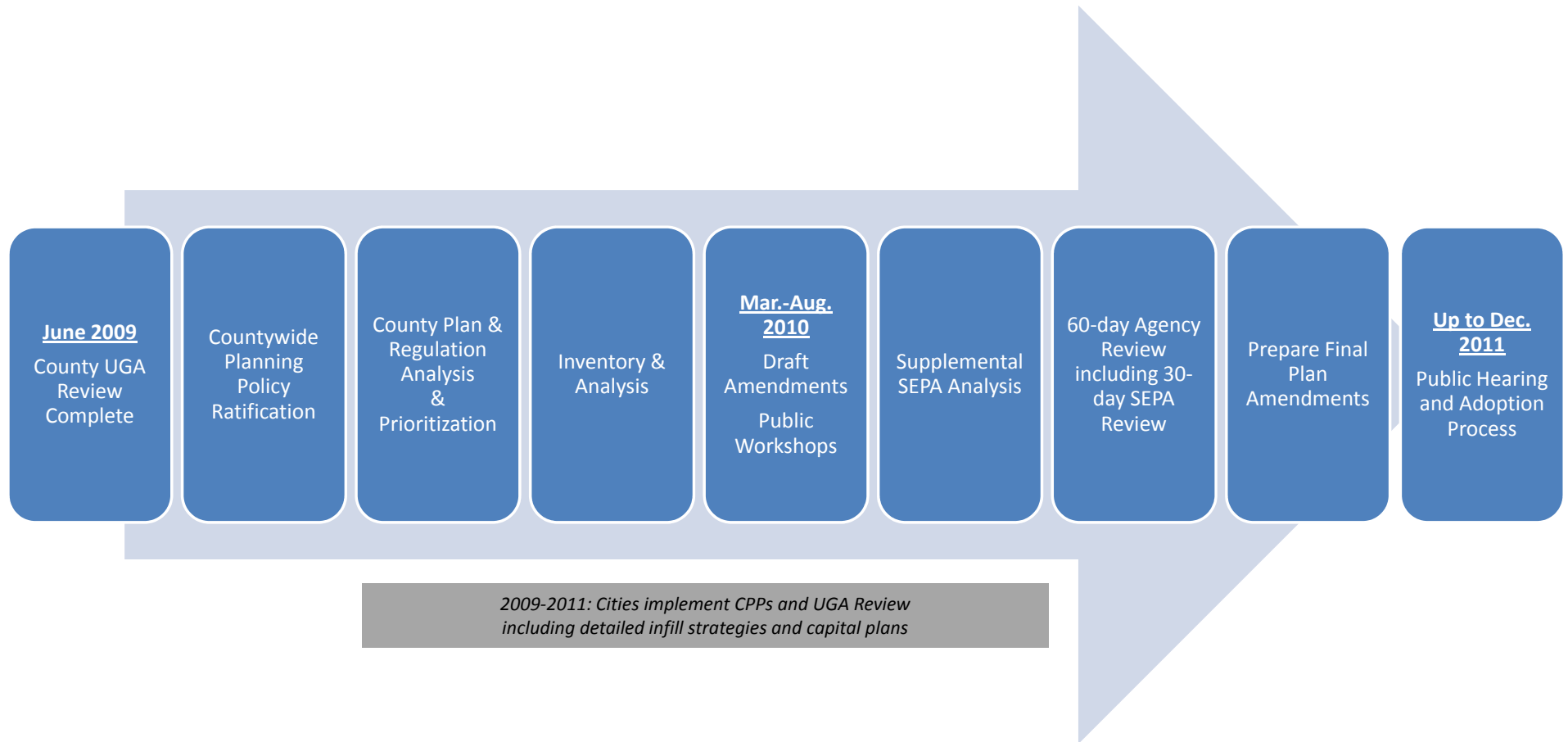
We look forward to the discussion and review of the flow charts and methodologies. Please don't hesitate to call or drop us a note with your questions prior to the meeting.

# Whatcom 2031 UGA Review Process Summary

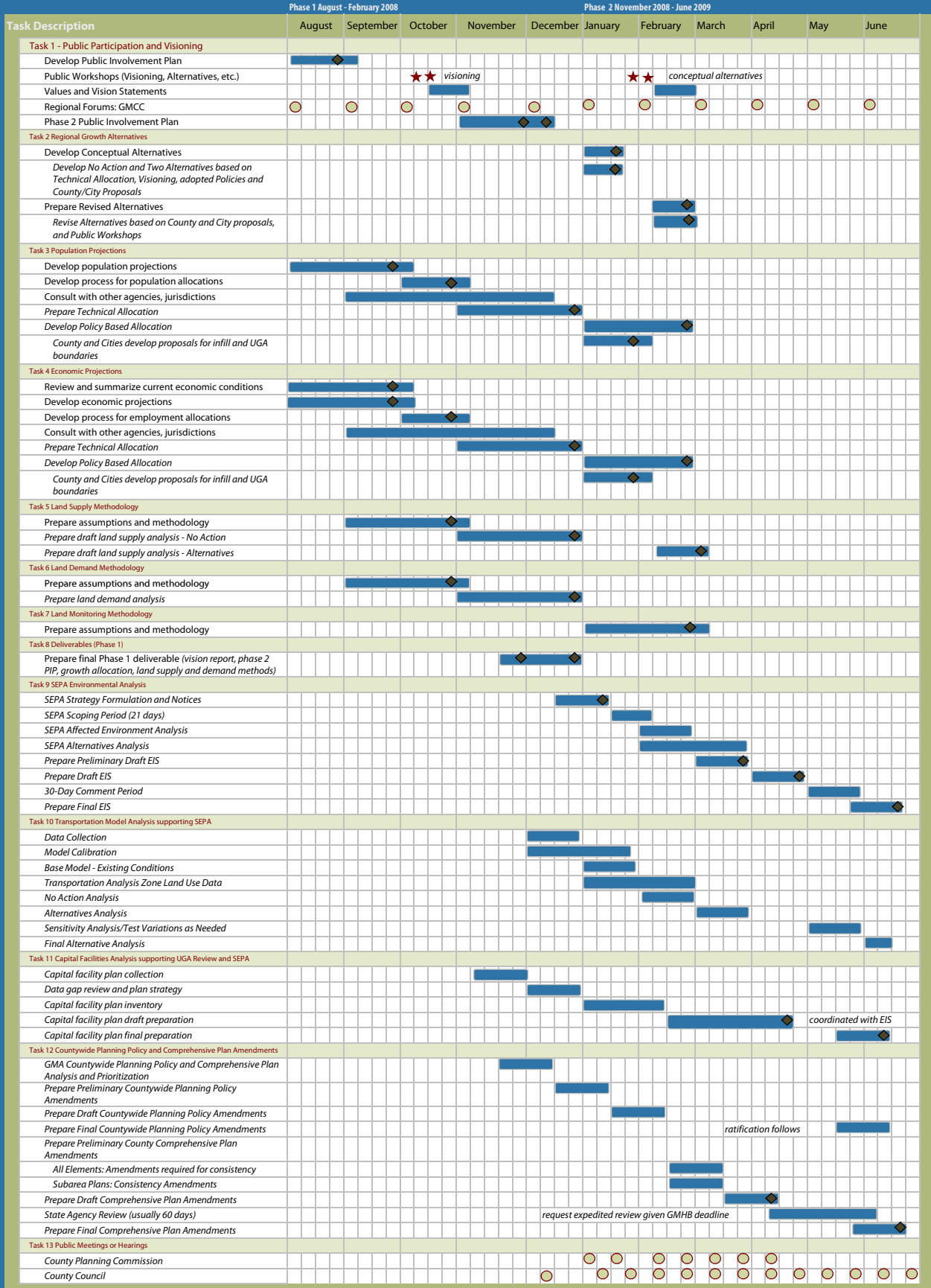


# Whatcom 2031

## Tasks: July 2009-December 2011



### Draft Schedule UGA Review



**Legend**

- Agency Meetings ○
- Workshops ○
- ★ deliverables
- ◆ task duration
- [Blue Bar] added detail/tasks in italics