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M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Whatcom County Planning Commission
FROM: Kate Blystone, Planner
DATE: April 13, 2010
SUBJECT: Draft Public Participation Plan Public Hearing.

Planning and Development Services has released the Draft Public Participation Plan (PPP) for Planning Commission and public review and comment. This draft is included in the following pages of this memo. A public hearing on the draft PPP is scheduled for April 22nd and this memo serves as an introduction to the PPP for planning commissioners.

Why are we doing this?

The Growth Management Act (GMA) requires the County perform a review and possible revision of the comprehensive plan and development regulations every 7 years [RCW 36.70A.130(1)]. Our deadline for this action was originally December 1, 2011. This deadline, however, was extended to 2014 at the conclusion of the most recent legislative session. The County has not decided to take the deadline extension and, for now, intends to proceed on a course completing the update by 2011.

The GMA also requires that there be "early and continuous public participation" in planning processes and that the County "shall establish and broadly disseminate to the public a public participation program..." The Washington Administrative Code (WAC) further describes the types of public participation activities that may occur to achieve this requirement. The County considered both the GMA and the appropriate WACs when drafting the PPP.

What is in the plan?

The PPP contains five chapters:

1. Introduction
2. The Issues
3. Project Participants
4. Public Participation Approach
5. Conclusion

The "Introduction" chapter describes the legal requirements, goals, and objectives of this plan. Primarily the plan establishes a framework to meet the following objectives:

- Provide a roadmap for the public, outlining a clear and accessible public process through December 1, 2011;
- Ensure input is from a broad base of public participants and is elicited in a timely fashion, considered and incorporated as appropriate into the Comprehensive Plan and Development Regulation updates; and
- Make a concerted and continuous effort to ensure that elected officials and staff are fully aware of and understand community and stakeholder concerns.

The second chapter, "The Issues," is a complete list of the issues that will need to be addressed as part of this periodic review. These issues can be sorted into three categories: statutory requirements, reconciliation items, and docketed amendment requests. Statutory requirements are those required by state law. Reconciliation items are those that were slated for later consideration upon completion of the 2009 Urban Growth Area review and revision. Docketed amendment requests were docketed by the county council through the yearly docketing process.

"Project Participants" is a chapter that attempts to identify the audiences that information about these projects need to reach. It also suggests a more clearly defined role for the planning commission. This plan identifies the planning commission as a central force in the public participation process, involving the commission in town hall meetings, open houses, and other public participation activities. The goal is that the planning commission will be involved earlier in the process and hear more from the public throughout the process.

The fourth chapter, "Public Participation Approach" identifies three levels of public participation and the general approach that will be taken with each issue listed in chapter two. All approaches provide ample opportunity for public participation, but some projects require more methods of eliciting public response to produce a community-supported solution.

The final chapter provides the reader with contact information for Planning and Development Services, the Planning Commission, and the County Council, and provides some closing thoughts on the plan.

What's next?

Planning and Development Services staff would like feedback from the Planning Commission and the public about the plan at the April 22nd hearing. Staff suggests that the Planning Commission recommend changes to the public participation plan and/or a recommend the plan be forwarded to the County Council for their review and consideration.