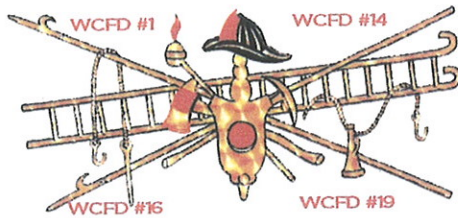


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LONG RANGE
PLANNING DIVISION



EAST COUNTY FIRE COMMISSIONERS and CHIEFS

David Stalheim, Director
Whatcom County Planning and
Development Services Dept.
5280 Northwest Drive
Bellingham, WA 98226

April 28, 2008

Re: Foothills Subarea Plan

Dear Mr. Stalheim:

This letter is in response to the Foothills Subarea Plan that is currently in review. The information reported on Page 95 of the plan under the heading of "Fire Protection/Emergency Medical Services" is woefully inadequate. The Foothills Subarea Plan should and needs to more fully explain the adverse impacts of the Subarea Plan's population projections, especially in the Columbia Valley area, on the ability of the fire districts to provide fire protection and EMS responders.

The Whatcom County Fire Protection Districts that provide services in the Foothills Subarea include District 1 (Everson, Nugent's Corner and Deming), District 14 (Welcome, Kendall, Maple Falls and Sumas), District 16 (Acme/Van Zandt) and District 19 (Glacier). All of these fire districts are composed of volunteers with the exception of District 1 which has a full-time chief and District 14 which has a full-time division chief.

Recent growth in the Columbia Valley region has resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of responses for both fire and EMS for the Kendall station. This also increases the number of mutual aid responses from other stations in this fire district and adjacent districts. Any mutual aid responses reduce the availability of proper coverage and response times of the mutual aid responders to their own area.

Over the past three years, District 14 has not been able to replace the number of volunteers that have retired or left the area. Most families have two members that leave the area to work. This makes their day response slim. It also makes their late night/early morning responses inadequate because the people that have to get up and go to work cannot take the risk of being tied up on a call. Therefore, they do not respond, not because they don't want to, but because they can't or they will miss work. Kendall Station, which used to have 26 volunteer firefighters, is now down to 19 volunteers. Seven of those volunteers have 20 or more years on the department. Kendall recently had a drive for volunteer firefighter recruitment but it was not successful. Within the past 5 years, only one new recruit has stayed longer than a couple of years.

Currently, all fire districts have seen the implementation of Basic Life Support transport by volunteers. This requires that the aid car and responders from the east end of the county make a minimum two hour round trip into Bellingham to transport non-critical patients. While that aid unit is on the road, any additional EMS events require a response from other stations or districts. A mutual aid response from another station or district can add at minimum an additional 15 to 20 minutes to the response time. Increased response time from other stations or districts will literally mean life or death to a critically ill or critically injured individual.

Unrealistic population projections for the Columbia Valley area will only further exacerbate the current problems in the area of response to fire and EMS events. Building another station that must be staffed with full time, paid personnel, sleeping quarters and added equipment is one solution to this problem. However, this solution will require a substantial tax increase for the area. The Subarea Plan calls for low income housing in the Columbia Valley area. Low income housing and substantial tax revenue are not compatible. Also, as shown in the past, staffing and volunteers for another station is a major problem.

It is extremely disturbing that the Foothills Subarea Plan focus is primarily on the Columbia Valley area. This is blatantly evident in the listing of Implementation Projects and throughout the plan itself. The lack of consideration and inclusion of reasonable discussions of the communities outside the Columbia Valley suggests a bias to promote the Columbia Valley interests and development above and to the detriment of the rest of the Foothills Subarea.

All of these factors will result in a lower standard of care for our area. Please consider our fire and EMS response and challenges in your Foothills Subarea Plan.

Sincerely,

Larry Moore
Whatcom County Fire District #14 Commissioner Chair

Date: 4-28-08

Osborn J. Dorrson
Whatcom County Fire District #1 Commissioner Chair

Date: 5-14-08

Larry Kraus
Whatcom County Fire District #16 Commissioner Chair

Date: 4-28-08

Tom Corallo
Whatcom County Fire District #19 Commissioner Chair

Date: 4-28-08