

# *Vision Week Evaluative Summary*

June 5-8 2006: Deming, Kendall, Glacier, Maple Falls



**July 2006**  
Presented to  
Whatcom County Foothills Advisory Committee

Whatcom County Foothills Advisory Committee  
**c/o Whatcom County Planning & Development Services**  
Northwest Avenue  
Bellingham, WA

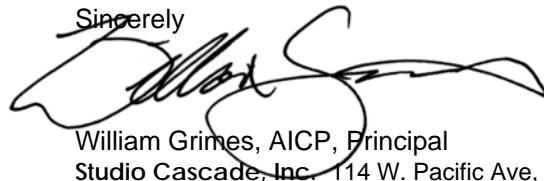
**Subject: Evaluative Summary of Vision Week**

Dear Committee Members:

Attached is our evaluative summary of the vision week exercise. You have already received the raw data, and many of you attended the various Vision Week events. I am interested to learn how your interpretations of what was said compare to ours. We welcome your thoughts on this material and the next steps of compiling a vision statement and planning goals.

Please feel free to e-mail me at [bgrimes@studiocascade.com](mailto:bgrimes@studiocascade.com) to discuss this report in more detail. I look forward to hearing from you and to meeting with you in the near future to discuss our direction from this point forward in more depth.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'William Grimes', written over a circular stamp or seal.

William Grimes, AICP, Principal  
Studio Cascade, Inc. 114 W. Pacific Ave, Ste 200 Spokane, WA 99201

## Vision Week

Vision Week consisted of four meetings on four sequential evenings. The meetings were held in Deming, Kendall, Glacier, and Maple Falls, with each enjoying spirited discussion and participation. Attendance varied from one meeting to the next. The least well attended was Deming's with fewer than 20 participants. The other meetings, however, involved high levels of participation. Events in Glacier and Maple Falls spilled outside the two venues, with participants standing around tables during group exercises.

Vision Week's intent was to engage the community in discussions on the various issues facing the Foothills subarea, the opportunities those issues present, and the types of visions that participants had for the future. Each meeting was run in similar fashion, with the consultant making an initial presentation to the group about the planning process and providing instructions on the group activities to follow. (A copy of the PowerPoint presentation for the Maple Falls meeting is attached as Appendix A.) Participants were able to view aerial photographs of the planning area, as well as several informational maps and diagrams depicting the environmental constraints impacting the planning area.

Participants entering the venues were directed to tables, formed into groups and then asked to participate in discussing issues, opportunities and visions for various topics. The topics included:

- **Community** - Who lives here? Works here?
- **Economy** - How do the dollars flow?
- **Growth & Change** - What will be different tomorrow?
- **Identity** - What is the Foothills' defining essence?
- **Land Use** - How do we shape/change our space?
- **Transportation** - How do we get around?

Each group had an opportunity to work on two of the above topics, with one selected by the meeting facilitator and the second selected by the group. At the end of the discussions on issues and opportunities, groups passed their worksheets to another table for that table to interpret their thoughts and produce vision statements. (A typical blank worksheet is attached as Appendix B.) At the end of the group session, each table was invited to relate their worksheet comments to the entire gathering. Other participants were invited to comment, ensuring that interpretations were correct and that proposed vision statements accurately reflected group thoughts.

Studio Cascade collected the worksheets and transcribed the comments into an Excel worksheet (Appendix C). Later work compiled the issues into separate worksheets, identifying the frequency of various issues raised (Appendix D) and the vision statements proposed by the various groups (Appendix E).

This report presents an evaluative summary of the various comments by the participants, helping the advisory committee and the community translate Vision Week's outcomes into a meaningful vision statement and planning goals.

## Overall Findings

Most of Vision Week's participants favored a continuation of the area's rural character, preservation of open spaces and habitat, and a resistance to population growth. Interestingly, participants also asked for transportation improvements, increased communications capabilities, increased activities for youth, and increased local employment opportunities. The two positions appear to be contradictory, but not entirely unexpected in an area whose appeal is its beauty, slow-paced quality of life, and community values on social interconnectedness.

People who reside or own property in the Foothills subarea, at least as represented in Vision Week, appreciate what the physical setting has to offer, even though they are not entirely satisfied with the lack of services and amenities that accompany rural isolation.

The principal challenge in responding to Vision Week will be in finding ways to preserve the aspects of the subarea people hold most dear while also increasing the availability of public services and managing the influx of area residents.

## Community

Participants identified the transportation system and the visceral “sense of community” as important issues facing the subarea in this topic. They also identified the area’s relative isolation, growth rate, public safety, recreation facilities, and challenges for providing public services as important issues. Given the thread of discussions during the work sessions, this is not surprising. What is surprising, however, is the relative unimportance given to employment and issues surrounding seasonal residents. Groups discussing other topics related to economy and growth saw these two issues as extremely important determinants and limiters of community and community success. While some may believe that local jobs and the presence of full-time residents are important to the subarea’s success, they did not appear to be issues related to the overall sense of community.

## Economy

Those groups discussing the area's economy focused on local job creation and the enhancement of local businesses. They also considered access to local services important, attempting to create an economic environment of increased diversity and self-sufficiency. The primary focus appeared to be enhancing the primary industrial sector, which in this case would predominantly be in resource-based industry, and then developing a robust service sector to enable money to circulate within the local area before leaving the Foothills. Groups also cited improvements to the communications and utility infrastructure as important to improve the economic environment. Interestingly, there was a sentiment that governmental regulation, mostly through zoning, was an impediment to economic growth. Neither public transportation nor the increase in commuting habits was considered terribly important by participants, but they were mentioned by some groups.

## Growth and Change

Groups discussing growth and change believed that transportation and public safety will be the most important issues for the community to address. Their comments indicated a general belief that the worst aspects of the transportation system and the most pernicious aspects of crime and drug use will project into the future uncorrected. This indicates a high level of awareness of certain current problems and a lack of confidence that the County can respond adequately to the challenges of growth ahead. Participants also recognized the potential for increased encroachment on natural resources and the resulting impact on domestic water supplies, access to recreational lands, and the conversion of agricultural and forest lands to other uses. Some believed that a more “sustainable” approach to growth management will be important, requiring some degree of regional collaboration in the face of increased resource scarcity. Many participants also foresee improvements to the communications infrastructure, enabling increased mobile telephone access and increased access to the Internet.

## Identity

Yes, the most prolific issue mentioned was the retention of the subarea's rural character. Participants overwhelmingly believe that rural character and the environment are fundamental components of the Foothill's identity. Public safety and the area's relative isolation also were important components, indicating the groups' awareness that there are drawbacks to the subarea's valued remoteness...drawbacks they are willing to accept to a degree.

## Land Use

Development density and design, rural character, and the prominence of small-town commercial centers were most frequently mentioned by the participants. They were concerned with the subarea's changing character with the influx of new residents, hoping that new development will respect the low-density nature of the majority of the subarea and act to enhance the individuality and commercial vitality of the four commercial centers. There was little mention of the proposed development in Columbia Valley and its proposed addition of a fifth commercial center to the subarea. However, some did identify it by name, and other comments indicated that commercial centers and areas of higher development intensity should locate near population centers. Some participants also noted that enforcement of existing regulations has been lax, leading to concerns that implementation of the subarea's policies and ensuing development regulations may be problematic.

## Transportation

Participants tended to focus on several, repeated issues, concentrating on non-automotive facilities, transportation safety, public transportation, and the improvement of roads in and through the subarea. Comments sometimes directly contradicted each other, with some advocating for narrower roads, with facilities for non-motorized travel. Others desired increased rights of way and increased automobile capacity to facilitate movement by car in the face of coming growth. Most agreed that existing facilities for those who choose to walk or ride a bike are either unsafe or inconvenient, creating a hazardous and unattractive environment for non-automotive travel. Some participants acknowledged that the County's growth management and land use policies may not be consistent with its transportation policies, stating that road improvements and highway capacity increases will lead to increased development pressure. Some participants noted that bus service to the farthest reaches of the east valley is non-existent, and that the construction of a park-and-ride facility may increase transit ridership.

## Appendices

- Appendix A – Maple Falls PowerPoint Presentation
- Appendix B – Sample Worksheet
- Appendix C – Comments Transcription
- Appendix D – Issue Summary
- Appendix E – Vision Summary