

**Foothills Subarea Plan Advisory Committee
Meeting Summary, July 19, 2006**

Committee members in attendance:

Richard Banel

Bill Coleman

Jan Eskola

Gary Gehling, Chair

Amy Mower

Norma Otto

Lou Piotrowski

Cindy Purdy

Alan Seid

1) Determination of Quorum

The meeting was called to order by Gary Gehling and a determination of a quorum was made.

2) Public Comment – First Period

- Matt Aamot reported that Rick Gantman, Mt Baker Schools Superintendent is interested in having a school facilities discussion. The committee agreed to have him come to a future meeting.
- Matt also reported that Doug Allen from the State Department of Ecology will be at the August 2nd meeting. Doug has requested input from the committee on what they would like him to address. Gary and Amy expressed interest in water rights, water availability, issues beyond water quality, for example contamination by hormone mimics that interrupt the endocrine system.
- Lou asked about a County representative. Alan agreed to ask Tom Anderson, formerly of the PUD, to speak about water rights.
- Mike Head mentioned that the Sheriff has requested 23 new deputies.
- Heidi Doorenbal expressed dissatisfaction with the draft questionnaire. She said it didn't represent the community.
- Jack Petree pointed out that Office of Financial Management (OFM) population figures show a growth in Whatcom County of 12,100 between 2002-2006. Matt said that he submitted a chart and graph to the committee members of the OFM estimated population growth.
- Barb Gregory asked how many rural recreation areas are left in the state, referring to recreation areas away from urban areas, but not necessarily parks. No one could provide an answer.

3) Meeting Summary

The July 5, 2006 minutes were approved by consensus with an amendment. Lou requested that the minutes reflect that Lou agreed to write Bill Grimes about his concerns and questions with the draft questionnaire.

4) Presentation – Nooksack Tribe, Bill Coleman

Bill welcomed the committee members and public to the Tribal Center. He gave an overview of the growth of the Tribe. In 1998 there were 800 members, today they have 1852 members. He emphasized how quickly the Tribe is growing economically. The casino employs over 600 people. Six years ago administration employed less than 50 people, now there are over 300 employed. The public works department has generated \$14 million in work for the Tribe through their construction company. The company recently has built a 30,000 square foot cold storage building in Blaine and helped to build the Lummi School. Dr

James, former Whatcom County Health Director, is the Tribal Health Director. Larry Mount, former Whatcom County Sheriff, is Chief of Police for the Tribe.

Bill said that the Administration has a philosophy of looking seven generations into the future. They recently built in a joint venture with the Raymond James Company, 24 homes on Mission Road with grant money. After 15 years tribal members will become owners of these homes. They have received the same grant this year and plan to build 24 more homes on Rutsatz Road.

Future plans include a destination resort on the Trust land across the Mt Baker Highway from the casino.

Jan asked if there were specific cultural locations in the foothills with which the Tribe might have concerns. Bill said the yes there were some sites. The State Historical Society, Environmental Protection Agency and the US Forest Service have consulted with the Tribe. The regalia for the religious rites and ceremonies come from the mountains. When the members are finished, they return the regalia to the mountains, the site being sacred and not shared with the public. He also said that water and logging issues are hot topics.

Matt asked if the land across from the casino is fee or trust land. Bill responded that the 43 acres is trust land, as well as land south of the railroad tracks.

Lou asked how many acres the reservation is. Bill said in 1973 they had 9/10 of an acre. Now trust land held in perpetuity is 400 acres.

Asked if the Tribal meeting are open to the public, Bill responded, yes, they meet the first Tuesday of the month at 7:30 PM in the building that was once the Deming Tavern.

Lou asked if there are any other specific topics the Tribe needs to have considered by the committee. Bill said to just keep in touch.

Leaf Swanson asked if the Tribe makes a distinction between ground water versus surface water. Bill deferred to the Natural Resource Division.

5) Presentation – Population Projection, John McLaughlin, Professor WWU

John started his presentation by stating that he has a concern with the modeling approach used for local population projections and the implications. He pointed out that human actions are depleting natural capital and that sustainability can no longer be taken for granted. This County has an opportunity approach this differently.

ECONorthwest (ECONW) was hired by the County and Bellingham to determine population projections, as required by GMA. John proceeded to point out the errors in the math of the ECONW model. He said also that their model contains invalid assumptions: 1. past trends will continue without change, and 2. growth can't be controlled.

John found that the math was correct with the OFM projections, but the assumptions were not. Specifically, 1. OFM assumed an increase in fertility and migration rates for the next 20 years, which contradicts the trends in the data for migration rates and does not take into consideration the real reasons for migration, and 2. the same incorrect assumptions as ECONW projecting into the future using past rates and no control over growth.

John proposed a simple model that includes feedback. He stated that better models and projects: 1. use valid analytical methods, 2. include population feedbacks on natural increase and migration, 3. represent economic factors realistically and 4. include local policies. John presented graphs that show the population increase from 1990 to 2022 comparing his projections, the adopted County projections and the OFM high, medium and low projections. John's model fits best with the OFM low projection. He contended that ECONorthwest's population estimates were too high, due to math and invalid assumptions, and thus incorrect. John believed his model was more accurate in projecting population increases. When asked for his analysis regarding why actual population figures for 2003, 2004 and 2005 exceeded both the lower estimated numbers and ECONorthwest's higher estimated figures, he stated that he did not have that information in his head, but that it was in his briefcase. He did not produce this information.

John then talked about the crash in timber harvesting from 1970 to 2000. While there were some policy changes, the main reason for this was over harvesting or exceeding sustainability. He said that commodities like timber and fish are renewable but buildable land is not. At five people per acre and 1.53% growth, with 10% buildable land removed for the Critical Area Ordinance requirements, buildable land in Whatcom County hypothetically will be depleted by 2137.

John then departed from the discussion on his comparison of his and ECONorthwest's population prediction models and talked about other land use planning issues and policies. He discussed carrying capacity elements for water quantity, quality, public water supplies, and critical areas. His recommendations include: identify local and regional carrying capacities, include carrying capacity in population projections, include other feedbacks in population projection, plan within carrying capacity limits, and reject applications that would exceed carrying capacity. He pointed out that subsidies contribute to growth. For example, developments don't pay for all of their impacts; they receive \$10,000-\$25,000 per unit in subsidy. The County could decide not to subsidize growth by raising or imposing impact fees. John explained how such factors as insufficient carrying capacity could and should be taken into consideration to stop growth. He suggested planning within carrying capacity limits.

John acknowledged that it has been said that population projections have to be within the OFM high and low range. John said the RCW 43.62.035 allows for petitioning OFM to revise the projection if a city or county believes that a projection will not accurately reflect actual population growth.

Alan referred to the seven generation concept that Bill had mentioned earlier in the meeting. He asked if is better to project growth on the higher side to be safe or project lower growth. He would like to know which is better, the point being that it's not just a quantitative issue, but also qualitative.

John emphasized starting with the most accurate projection, which is what GMA encourages.

Richard pointed out that it would be interesting to correlate the last 3-4 years of growth with economic factors, such as rising interest rates.

Heather Swanson requested that projections be presented openly and clearly.

6) Draft Questionnaire

The committee members will send comments on the draft questionnaire to Bill Grimes by next Monday.

7) Public Comment – Second Session

Since the public participated in both of the presentations, there was no second public comment session.

The next meeting will be August 2, 2006 at the Kendall Elementary School from 6:30 P.M. to 8:30 P.M.

Submitted by:

Sharon Digby