

1 Introduction and Population Projections

This subarea plan updates and replaces the November 1988 Foothills Subarea component of the Whatcom County Comprehensive Land Use Plan. That 1988 plan was prepared before the 1990 adoption of the Growth Management Act (GMA), and is now more than almost 20 years old. While the plan has been an appropriate tool for the direction and regulation of development in the Foothills area, it is now out of date and must be replaced with a new subarea plan revised to address shifts in population and changes in the regulatory context over the past 20 years.

The current comprehensive plan for Whatcom County was updated in 20092005. It directs the County to review and update its subarea plans to ensure they are compliant with the new comprehensive plan. The comprehensive plan is intended to guide growth in unincorporated areas for the next 20 years and it contains descriptions of existing conditions related to land use, the physical environment, transportation, and capital facilities and utilities. The Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan comprehensive plan addresses the requirements of the Growth Management Act (GMA), the planning goals of the GMA (RCW 36.70A.020), mandatory plan elements (RCW 36.70A.070), and the current County Wide Planning Policies. The GMA authorizes adoption of subarea plans that are consistent with the county-wide comprehensive plan, but does not require such subarea plans. Whatcom County has chosen to meet GMA requirements primarily through the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan and associated development regulations. Subarea Plans are intended to provide local perspective and address issues of a particular community, but are not intended to address every requirement of the GMA.

Whatcom County established the Foothills Subarea Plan as one of the most important plans for updating upon completion of the new comprehensive plan. The County allocated funds for the update in its 2006 budget, hired a consultant to prepare the plan and appointed a Foothills Subarea Plan Advisory Committee (FSPAC) to provide input and direction to the process. The update included four Vision Week workshops (June 5-8, 2006), a Kendall Small Town workshop (September 15-16, 2006), a Columbia Valley Urban Growth Area workshop (October 14, 2006), a Foothills Subarea Plan Policy workshop (November 16, 2006), a questionnaire (October-December 2006) and a number of Foothills Subarea Plan Advisory Committee meetings, ultimately resulting in a preferred alternative subarea plan submitted to the County's planning commission.

The subarea plan's structure generally conforms to the structure of the County's comprehensive plan, simplifying comparisons between the two documents. Chapters of the subarea plan contain sections contained in the comprehensive plan, addressing those items that are relevant to the subarea and differentiating the subarea from the county as a whole.

Background

The Foothills Subarea consists of approximately 133,000 acres (208 square miles) in the northeast portion of Western Whatcom County. The northern boundary is the Canadian border and the Vedder Mountain ridge. The Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest bounds the subarea on the east. The southern boundary generally follows the drainage divide between the Middle Fork and the South Fork of the Nooksack River, and the ridges of Sumas Mountain and Van Zandt Dike define the western boundary. The subarea boundary was modified in this subarea plan update to include the Deming area. Access to the subarea consists of Mount Baker Highway (SR542) from Bellingham, Reese Hill Rd. and South Pass Rd. from the west, Highway 9 and Mosquito Lake Road from the

south, and Highway 9 from the north. The Sumas border crossing into British Columbia is just to the northwest. Unincorporated communities within the subarea include Deming, Welcome, Kendall, Maple Falls, and Glacier. There is also an urban growth area designated in the Columbia Valley that includes the Peaceful Valley and Paradise Lakes developments and adjacent lands.

The Foothills communities of Deming, Kendall, Maple Falls and Glacier are nestled along the Nooksack River and Mount Baker Highway, among the foothills of Mount Baker. Deming is the most westerly town and is home to one of two libraries in the area. Mount Baker Junior High and Mount Baker High School, also located in Deming, provide secondary education to Foothills children and teens. The most populated communities are the subdivisions of Paradise Lakes and Peaceful Valley along Kendall Road near Kendall and within the Columbia Valley Urban Growth Area. Maple Falls, east of Kendall, houses the second library in the Foothills and serves as one of the gateways to Silver Lake. Glacier is the easternmost town before the Mount Baker ski area.

These ~~communities~~~~small towns~~ have deep roots in the Foothills, extending back into the early pioneer days. When settlers first arrived in the area, the Foothills were covered with dense blankets of giant evergreen trees. Places like Kendall and Deming were alive with resource-based economies. The primary resource, trees, kept the saw and shingle mills in business.

Today, the communities of the Foothills still have some remnants of a resource-based economy, but more jobs are in education (employment at Kendall School, Mt. Baker Junior High, or Mt. Baker High School) or retail. Jobs are scarce in the Foothills, and residents often have to commute to Bellingham, Lynden, Everson, Sumas or Ferndale to find work.

Population

~~According to the 2000 US Census, the total permanent population in the block groups — Whatcom County Census Tract 101, block groups 1, 2, 3, and 7 — that comprise the Foothills subarea was 4,682.~~ The Foothills Subarea 2006 population is estimated at 6,722 distributed throughout the subarea as shown in table 1.1.

Table 1.1 – 2006 Foothills Population Estimate

Area	Population
Columbia Valley Urban Growth Area	3,853
Glacier area	284
Maple Falls area	213
Deming Small Town	220
Remaining Subarea	2,152
Total:	6,722

Source: *Record of Decisions and Recommendations of the Foothills Subarea Plan Advisory Committee, December 6, 2006*

In coordination with ECONorthwest, the Foothills Subarea Plan Advisory Committee established recommended population estimates for the various population centers in the Foothills. About 29 percent of the total dwellings in the subarea are classified as “seasonal, recreational, occasional dwellings.” This suggests that the total number of units is greater than the number of households, resulting in a different set of demand characteristics than what might be expected where seasonal units do not represent such a high percentage of total units. Analysis by the Foothills Subarea Plan Advisory Committee indicates that

seasonal use is especially high in the Glacier area. Additionally, the percentage of homes in the Columbia Valley Urban Growth Area that are for seasonal use has declined, suggesting that these units have been converted from seasonal use to year-round use. It also makes it tricky to estimate and forecast resident population based on the number of households, especially when the proportion of seasonal units fluctuates.

Table 1.2 – Occupancy by Location, 2006

Area	Year Round Dwellings	Seasonal, Recreational, Occasional Dwellings	Vacant (unoccupied) Dwellings	Total Dwellings
Columbia Valley Urban Growth Area	1,239	126	16	1,381
Glacier Small Town Comp Plan Designation	22	10	5	37
Glacier area – Mt. Baker Rim	40	239	22	301
Glacier area – Snowline Subdivision	35	191	6	232
Glacier area – Snowwater & Snowline Condos	3	210	11	224
Glacier area – Glacier Springs/Glacier Greene	28	68	5	101
Maple Falls Small Town Comp Plan Designation	29	0	2	31
Maple Falls area – Cascades West/Rivendell Estates	47	3	5	55
Deming Small Town Comp Plan Designation	76	3	5	84
Remaining Subarea	739	133	76	948
Foothills Subarea Total:	2,258	983	153	3,394

Source: Foothills Subarea Plan Advisory Committee Recommendations and Decisions, attachment. December 6, 2006

Additionally, Camper’s Paradise, The Glen at Maple Falls, and Black Mountain Ranch accommodate approximately 2,500 recreational units (RVs and park models).

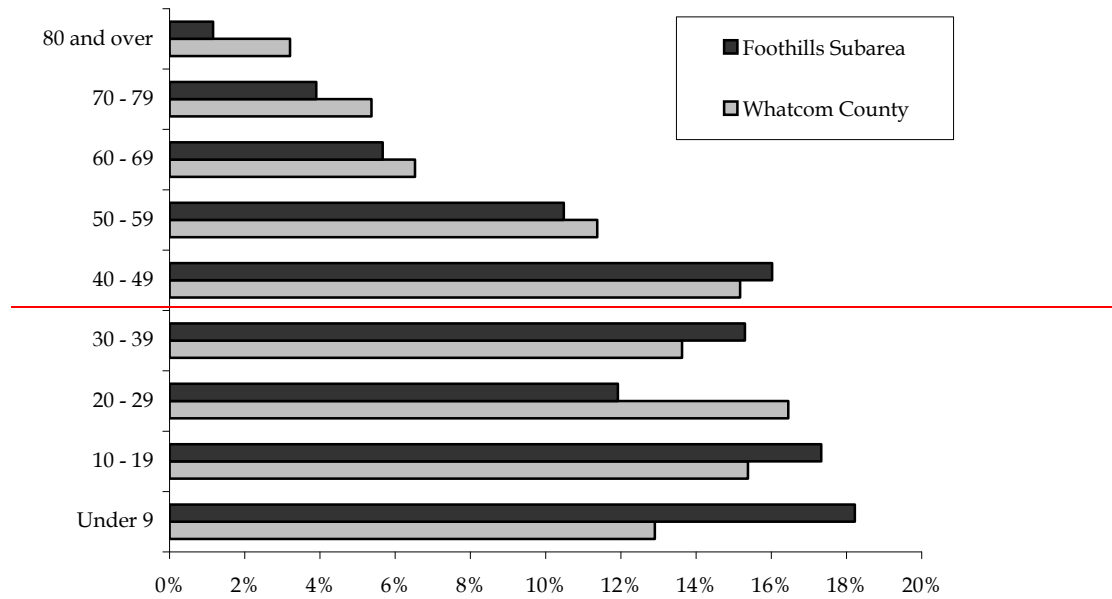
According to Washington State estimates, unincorporated areas throughout Whatcom County grew 37 percent between 2000 and 2006. The Columbia Valley was the fastest growing area, in terms of average annual growth rates, in Whatcom County during the 1990s.

As of the beginning of the ~~2009~~2007 school year, the Mount Baker School District had experienced a drop in school enrollment over the last ~~five~~three years.

Demographics

The culturally diverse demographic makeup of the county’s population has an effect on land use and demand for public services. Variations in household size, resident ages, and household incomes throughout the Foothills make this a diverse community. The cyclical influx of seasonal residents, many from Canada and who maintain recreational homes in parts of the county, also adds to the diversity mix.

Figure 1.1—Age by location



Source: 2000 Census, calculated by ECONorthwest

In the period between 1990 and 2000, the age composition of Whatcom County’s population changed appreciably, and some of the changes were different from what was happening statewide and nationwide. These changes were partly due to in-migration. For example, the age of persons at or near the age of retirement increased faster than aging occurs. Also the percentage of college aged residents is high compared to the state. The Foothills Subarea had 4,682 residents according to the 2000 Census. The highest populations are either under 19 or between 40 and 49.

Those people who consider themselves white comprise 92.6 percent of the population in the Foothills Subarea. The American Indian and Alaska Native races are the next largest, single race group with 102 people or 2.2 percent of the Census Tract Population. The population with two or more races is 3.4 percent of the population. There are high concentrations of people of Slavic ancestry in the Columbia Valley Urban Growth Area. According to the 2000 Census, in the Peaceful Valley Census Designated Place (which includes much of the Urban Growth Area), 22.2 percent of the population was of Russian ancestry and 4.9 percent was of Ukrainian ancestry.

Table 1.3—Race Distribution

Race	Whatcom County	Foothills Subarea
White alone	147,485	4,334
Black or African American alone	1,150	13
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	4,709	102
Asian alone	4,637	18
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	235	5
Some other race alone	4,159	52
Population of two or more races	4,439	158
Total	166,814	4,682

Source: 2000 Census, Whatcom County Census Tract 101, Block Groups 1, 2, 3, and 7

Existing Land Uses

Table 1.4 details how existing land uses are allocated within the Foothills, indicating the acres devoted to each land use type and the percentage of the subarea each land use occupies.

Table 1.4 – Acres and Percentage of Foothills Subarea by Land Use, 2007

Land Use	Total Acres	Percent of Subarea
Forestry	114,652	86.21
Agriculture	3,003	2.26
Residential	5,569	4.19
Vacant	4,102	3.08
Mining/Fishing/Related Uses	655	0.49
Public & Utilities	1,647	1.24
Industrial & Manufacturing	17	0.01
Commercial & Services	108	0.08
Nooksack Tribal Ownership	88	0.07
Property with no code (water bodies, streams, Nooksack River meander, roads, etc.)	3,147	2.37
Total	132,988	100.00

Source: Whatcom County Assessor, 2007

Population Forecast

The purpose of population forecasting, as it relates to land use planning, is to accommodate the long-term spatial requirements of various land uses such as residences, commerce, industry, recreation, and public facilities. Population forecasting also helps land use decision making for related matters, such as determining the appropriate scale and location of public works facilities and land development activities. Population forecasts are subject to revision which may be accomplished in the comprehensive plan update process.

ECONorthwest prepared ~~population forecasts that were incorporated into the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan in 2004, and they have also now prepared a range of proposed~~ forecasts for this subarea plan (Table 1.5). The Foothills Subarea Plan Advisory Committee took these numbers and other considerations into account and established a recommended population forecast, which ~~was modified for the Columbia Valley UGA and “remaining subarea” (rural and resource lands), is the~~ The adopted forecast for the Foothills Subarea ~~is shown below~~ (Table 1.6).

Table 1.5 – ECONorthwest Proposed Population Forecasts

	Columbia Valley UGA	Glacier	Maple Falls	Deming	Remaining Subarea	Total Population
Low Growth Assumption						
2006	3,853	284	213	220	2,152	6,722
2017	4,602	300	225	233	2,274	7,633
2027	5,270	314	236	244	2,381	8,445
Baseline Growth Assumption						
2006	3,853	284	213	220	2,152	6,722
2017	5,248	313	235	243	2,372	8,411
2027	6,483	338	254	262	2,563	9,900
High Growth Assumption						
2006	3,853	284	213	220	2,152	6,722
2017	6,382	340	255	263	2,575	9,815
2027	9,084	397	297	307	3,004	13,090

Source: December 2006, Foothills Subarea Population Forecast, ECONorthwest.

Table 1.6 – Foothills Subarea Plan adopted population forecast

	2027 2029 Population Projection	Population Increase from 2006-<u>2029</u> 2027	ECONorthwest Growth Assumption recommended by the FSPAG
Columbia Valley UGA	<u>5,000</u> 7,053	<u>1,147</u> 3,200	<u>Below the low growth assumption between baseline and high</u>
Glacier	397	113	High
Maple Falls	254	41	Baseline
Deming	262	42	Baseline
Remaining Subarea	<u>2,563</u> 3,004	<u>411</u> 852	<u>Baseline</u> High
Total Population	<u>8,476</u> 10,970	<u>1,754</u> 4,248	

Source: For the Columbia Valley UGA, County Council motion of March 17, 2009 and adoption of Ordinance 2009-071 on November 24, 2009. For Glacier, Maple Falls and Deming, Record of Decisions and Recommendations of the Foothills Subarea Plan Advisory Committee, December 20, 2006, February 7, 2007 and February 21, 2007 For the Remaining Subarea, ECONorthwest baseline projection from the Foothills Subarea Population Forecast, December 2006.

The ECONorthwest Population forecast report of December 1, 2006, page 11, suggested that the Baseline Growth Assumption be used in the Foothills Subarea Plan.

Forecasting is usually better, and better received, if it is based on a model of how the world works. In the context of housing and economic development, that understanding must certainly include how households and businesses make decisions about where to locate and what types of buildings to occupy. In the context of land use and growth management, the main variables that must be forecast are population and employment. The demand for built space creates a derived demand for land upon which to build that space.

Small area forecasts, such as those for the Foothills subarea, are difficult, and there are several limitations associated with forecasts like these:

- Projections for population in most cities and counties are simple projections of past growth rates into the future. They have no quantitative connection to the underlying factors that explain why and how much growth will occur.
- Even if planners had a sophisticated model that links all these important variables together, they would still face the problem of having to reforecast the future of the variables that they are using to forecast growth. All forecasting requires making assumptions about the future.
- Comparisons of past population projections to subsequent population counts have revealed that even much more sophisticated methods than the ones used in this study are often inaccurate. The smaller the area and the longer the period of time covered, the worse the result will be for any statistical method.
- Small areas start from a small base. An influx of 500 people in a city of 200,000 would have an overall impact on total population of 0.25 percent. An in migration of 500 people in a community of 10,000 would increase the community's population by more than 5 percent and dramatically increase the need for housing.
- Small communities near metropolitan areas have high growth potential, however a sustained growth rate over 10 to 20 years is less likely.
- Public policy makes a difference. Jurisdictions can affect the rate of growth through infrastructure, land supply, incentives and other policies. Such policies generally do not have an impact on regional growth rates, but may cause shifts of population and employment within a region.

The longer the forecast, the greater the potential is that actual population growth will vary from the forecast. This implies that jurisdictions should closely monitor actual population growth so that either plans can be modified to account for variations, or that policies can be implemented that increase the likelihood of achieving target populations.

Conclusion

This subarea plan integrates the population forecasts, community vision, land use plans, and a range of public policy direction into a single, comprehensive guide for the Foothills' future. It is based on a blend of technical assessment, extensive community input, and professional judgment, adopted through an open, public process. It is a compendium of the community's voice, detailing a vision for the Foothills and the steps and actions necessary to get there.