

January 27 2009

Whatcom County Planning Commission

Dear Commissioners,

I wish to address two issues from the Foothills Sub Area Draft (October 2007: fire and traffic.

Fire District 14 serves the majority of the population in the Foothills, including Columbia Valley UGA, and is concerned about the district's ability to serve additional growth. At the public hearing, a representative of FD14 indicated that continued growth would require a significant influx of funds to maintain their LOS. FD 14 has also acknowledged additional funding will be required even if no new growth occurs. Since the law prohibits fire districts to charge impact fees, new revenue must result from bonds, levees, increased shares of county taxes or developer mitigation funds.

Growth in the Foothills that is not accommodated in the Columbia Valley UGA will spread to the rural areas. Rural growth creates a greater impact on fire service by increasing response time and producing proportionally lower tax revenue, yet offers few options for mitigation. Concentrating growth decreases response time and produces proportionally higher tax revenue. The Fire Station in Kendall is within three miles of any home in the Columbia Valley UGA, including the undeveloped areas.

Creating planning conditions that encourage greater housing densities and higher housing values would help ease the financial load on FD 14. Concentrating growth would result in a number of additional benefits. It would create the opportunity to negotiate with developers to assure new roads meet current standards. It would also assure that hydrants are suitably located, that space is allotted for new fire stations and, more importantly, place FD14 in a position to obtain additional financial assistance.

FD 14 has indicated their greatest burden is providing transportation to distant medical facilities and services for local residents who have no other way of dealing with health needs. A well-planned UGA with a business center would attract and provide space for local medical service providers and services that would greatly alleviate this burden. Interfaith Council Clinic which has attempted to locate in the Columbia Valley, but has been unable to find suitable space. Supporting and maintaining the Foothills Subarea Plan Draft (October 07) for the UGA will ultimately reduce FD 14's medical services workload.

The perspective on traffic is similar to that of fire. Growth in the Columbia Valley UGA results in only one more access point to SR 547 (than those currently existing). Urban growth creates greater opportunities for roadway mitigation using impact fees or mitigation revenues. Rural growth means a large increase in access points along major roads and mitigation costs that must be born wholly by taxpayers.

A planned attractive UGA would create conditions that encourage both enhanced transit service and car-pooling with 'park and ride' facilities. A business center would not only create local jobs, it would encourage many people to walk to shopping and work.

Most existing or planned housing in the Columbia Valley UGA is within one mile of the town center location proposed by the Foothills Sub-Area Plan Draft (October, '07).

If the UGA is eliminated, substantially reduced, or left unsupported these community benefits will be lost for the foreseeable future. The residents of the Columbia Valley have been disadvantaged long enough.

I ask the Planning Commission to respect the recommendations for the UGA status as given in the Foothills Sub-Area Plan Draft (October, '07).

Respectfully submitted,

Carole MacDonald
8174 Mt Baker Hwy
P O Box 2029
Maple Falls WA 98266