

WHATCOM COUNTY
Planning & Development Services

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David Stalheim
Director

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Memo

To: The Honorable Whatcom County Council

From: David Stalheim, Whatcom County Planning Director 

Date: March 5, 2009

RE: Columbia Valley

The Whatcom County Planning Commission issued Findings of Fact, Reasons for Action, Conclusions and Recommendations relating to the Columbia Valley on February 19, 2009. The Commission majority recommended rescinding the UGA designation and designating the Columbia Valley as a LAMIRD. A Planning Commission minority report recommends retaining the UGA.

Background and Purpose

The Foothills Subarea Plan Advisory Committee, which was appointed by the County Executive and confirmed by the County Council, recommended a Draft Foothills Subarea Plan (Oct. 2007) that retained an urban growth area in the Columbia Valley. In December 2008, Whatcom County issued a Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) relating to the Foothills Subarea Plan. This SEIS evaluated three land use alternatives:

- The Draft Foothills Subarea Plan (Oct. 2007) with a modified planning horizon year,
- The No Action Alternative, which retains existing land use designations, and
- The Rural/LAMIRD (Limited areas of more intensive rural development) alternative. Main features of this alternative include eliminating the Columbia Valley/Kendall Urban Growth Area (UGA) and reducing or eliminating areas of more intensive rural development in the Deming, Welcome, Maple Falls, and Glacier areas.

Whatcom County is in the process of reviewing the Foothills Subarea Plan, conducting the 10-year urban growth area (UGA) review, and conducting review of limited areas of more intensive rural development (LAMIRDs) in the rural comprehensive plan element update. Subarea plans are subject to concurrent review of comprehensive plan amendments that can normally occur only once per year. Adoption of the Subarea Plan is anticipated with the 2010 batch of comp plan amendments. However, the 10-year UGA review and LAMIRD review are legal mandates that must be completed in 2009. Therefore, we are asking for direction relating to whether the Columbia Valley should be reviewed as a UGA in the 10-year review or a LAMIRD in the rural element update. Potential motions could be:

- The Whatcom County Council requests Planning & Development Services to evaluate rescinding the Columbia Valley UGA designation and review the Columbia Valley for LAMIRD status under rural comprehensive plan update process; or
- The Whatcom County Council requests Planning & Development Services to evaluate the Columbia Valley in the 10-year UGA review process with a Columbia Valley population allocation of “x” for 2029-31.

We are not asking for Council approval of an ordinance at this time. Rather, we are asking for direction relating to which process the Columbia Valley would be evaluated under. An ordinance would be approved at a later date with the other areas included in the 10-year UGA review or LAMIRD process.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at ext. 50200.