

WHATCOM COUNTY
PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT SERVICES
5280 Northwest Drive, Suite B
Bellingham, WA 98226-9097
360-676-6907, 360-380-8100
360-738-2525 Fax




DAVID STALHEIM
Director

J.E. "SAM" RYAN
Assistant Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: Pete Kremen, County Executive
Whatcom County Council

FROM: David Stalheim, Director 

RE: Foothills Subarea Plan

DATE: February 12, 2009

The Planning Commission held a public hearing on January 15, 2009 to hear testimony regarding the proposed Foothills Subarea Plan. On January 29, 2009, the Planning Commission made an initial recommendation to the Whatcom County Council regarding the status of the Columbia Valley Urban Growth Area.

▪ **Background and Purpose**

In November 2005, the County Council passed Resolution #2005-062 establishing a Foothills Subarea Plan Advisory Committee. The Committee finished their work and provided a recommended plan in October 2007. In 2008, an Environmental Impact Statement was prepared to consider the impacts and alternatives to the Committee's recommendation.

Since the Committee was formed and their recommendation was made, Whatcom County was found to be out of compliance with two parts of the Growth Management Act: 1) review and revision of Urban Growth Areas and 2) the amount of development allowed within rural areas. The status of Columbia Valley affects how these two Growth Management Act compliance issues are addressed. Thus, staff requested that the Planning Commission make a recommendation relating to whether the Columbia Valley Urban Growth Area should be retained or not, and the population that should be allocated to that area.

The Planning Commission has recommended that the Columbia Valley status as an Urban Growth Area be removed and that it be considered as a Limited Area of More Intense Rural Development (LAMIRD). The Planning Commission will consider their findings and conclusions on February 19, 2009 and forward them to the Council.

Consideration of the Foothills Subarea Plan is not allowed under the Growth Management Act in 2009, as the Growth Management Act limits amendments to once per year. Our concurrent review is scheduled for April of this year, immediately following review of your 2009 docket item requests. We are not limited to an annual amendment cycle for those items that are being considered to implement Western Washington Growth Management Hearings Board orders.

We are requesting Council direction as to whether to affirm the Planning Commission recommendation that the Columbia Valley be considered in the LAMIRD ordinance that will be subject to public hearings and ordinances later this year. Both the UGA and LAMIRD issues are Hearings Board orders that are planned for action in 2009. In order to keep with our work program and timelines for public input and ordinance preparation, we would respectfully request that the Council provide this direction in March if possible.

Before making this decision, the Council should consider whether to have a public hearing on the Planning Commission recommendation. The Council has two conflicting recommendations at this point: the Planning Commission recommendation and the Foothills Advisory Committee recommendation. A public hearing would provide the Council the benefit of hearing that input. A public hearing could be scheduled at the first meeting in March, with direction provided by the full Council at the second meeting in March.

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