

**WHATCOM COUNTY
PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT SERVICES**

POPULATION GROWTH MONITORING REPORT

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to compile population growth estimates for urban growth areas (UGAs) and non-urban areas (rural and resource lands), and to compare them to the population growth projections in the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan contains population projections for years 2013 - 2036 (Chapter 1, Table 4). Comprehensive Plan policies 2S-5 and 2DD-1 require monitoring of growth patterns within the county's UGAs and areas outside UGAs. This report uses population growth estimates derived from two different methods.

OFM-Based Estimates - First, growth estimates are derived from the Washington State Office of Financial Management's (OFM) Small Area Estimates Program. OFM does not provide an estimate of growth outside the UGAs. Growth outside UGAs was estimated by subtracting OFM's UGA growth figures from OFM's estimates for overall countywide growth.

Building Permit-Based Estimates - The second method is to estimate population growth based on building permit data. This produces an estimate of population growth based upon the net gain in dwelling units.

Because the two methods of estimating growth differ, they can be expected to yield different results.

In addition to the population growth estimates, this report shows recent subdivision activity outside the UGAs, which is another indication of rural growth levels.

II. OFM-BASED ESTIMATES

The OFM generates population estimates for UGAs as of April 1 of each year. OFM also estimates total Whatcom County population, as of April 1, using a different methodology. Figure 1 shows annual estimated growth for each UGA over the most recent five year period between April 1, 2013 and April 1, 2018. The chart also provides an estimate of growth outside UGAs, subtracting the total UGA estimates from the OFM countywide estimates.

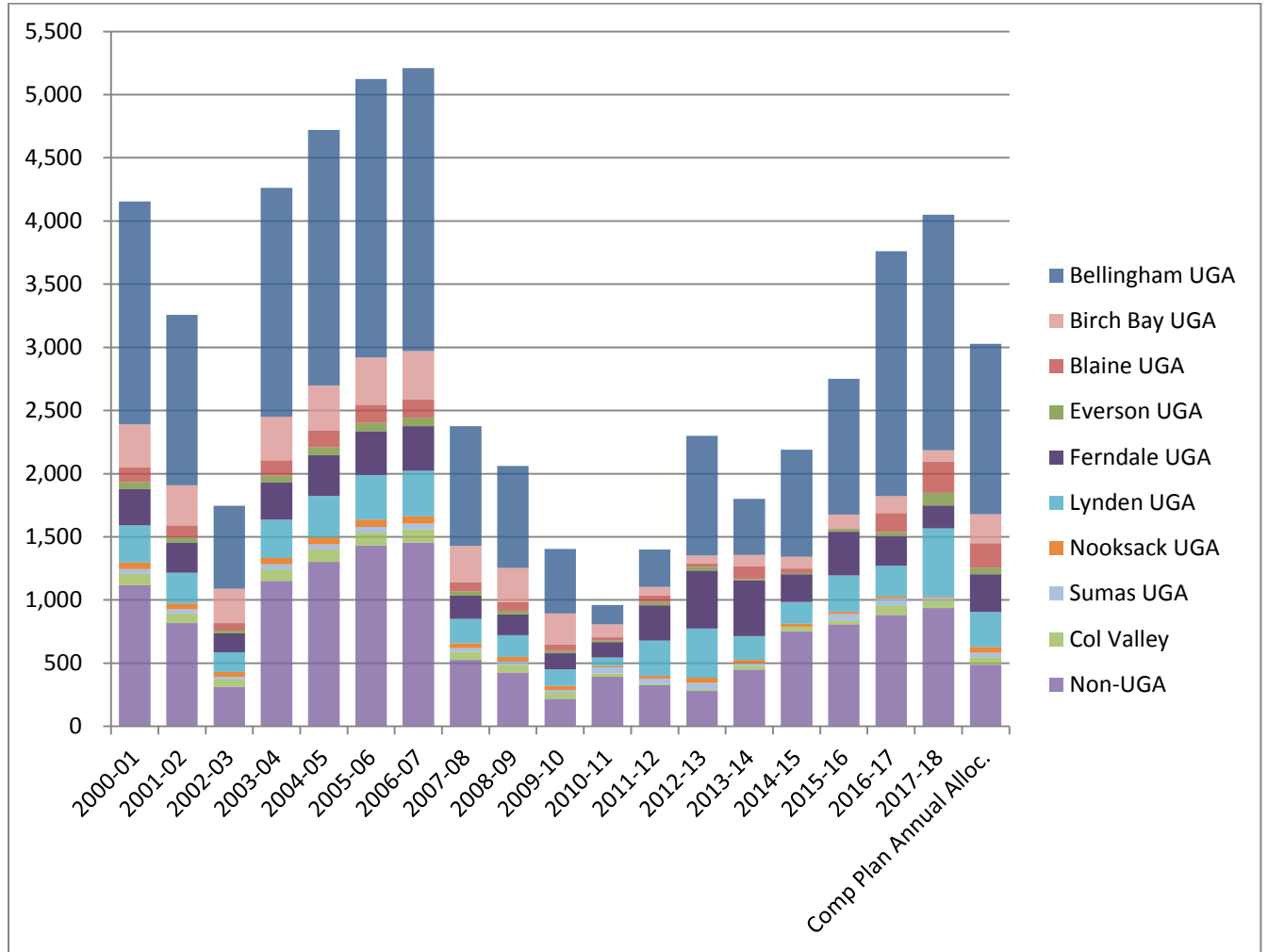
Figure 1. Population Growth Estimates - Based on OFM Data						
	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2013-18 Total Growth
Bellingham UGA	443	849	1,074	1,937	1,864	6,167
Birch Bay UGA	89	94	114	134	90	521
Blaine UGA	102	34	1	151	247	535
Everson UGA	11	10	21	30	101	173
Ferndale UGA	439	221	345	237	182	1,424
Lynden UGA	190	170	291	244	541	1,436
Nooksack UGA	25	25	15	15	10	90
Sumas UGA	19	(1)	50	54	19	141
Columbia Valley UGA	31	35	33	77	60	236
Outside of UGAs	450	753	806	881	936	3,826
Total	1,800	2,190	2,750	3,760	4,050	14,550

Comprehensive Plan Policies 2S-5 and 2DD-1 require studying population growth trends over five years. Figure 2 compares the OFM growth estimates (2013-18) with the five-year pro-rated allocation from the County Comprehensive Plan. As shown below, estimated growth was below the County Comprehensive Plan's growth projections for all locations except Lynden and the area outside UGAs. The far right hand column shows the percentage of the allocated growth estimated to have occurred in each area.

Figure 2. Growth Estimates Compared to Comprehensive Plan Allocations				
	2013-18 Total Growth	Comprehensive Plan 5-Year Allocation	Surplus (Deficit)	Estimated Growth as Percent of 5- Year Allocation
Bellingham UGA	6,167	6,750	(583)	91.4%
Birch Bay UGA	521	1,148	(627)	45.4%
Blaine UGA	535	960	(424)	55.8%
Everson UGA	173	270	(97)	64.2%
Ferndale UGA	1,424	1,485	(61)	95.9%
Lynden UGA	1,436	1,392	44	103.2%
Nooksack UGA	90	215	(125)	41.9%
Sumas UGA	141	190	(49)	74.2%
Columbia Valley UGA	236	292	(57)	80.7%
Outside of UGAs	3,826	2,438	1,387	156.9%
Total	14,550	15,141	(591)	96.1%

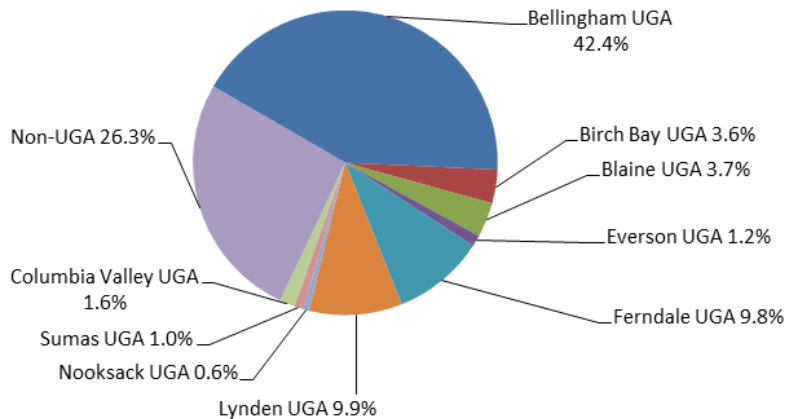
Figure 3 compares State OFM growth estimates to the County Comprehensive Plan’s pro-rated population growth projections (far right column). This figure illustrates the cyclical nature of population growth over time. In the last two years, overall population growth in Whatcom County has exceeded the annualized growth projection. In the three years prior to this, population growth was less than the annualized growth projection.

Figure 3. 2000-2018 OFM UGA Population Growth Estimates and County Comp Plan Projection

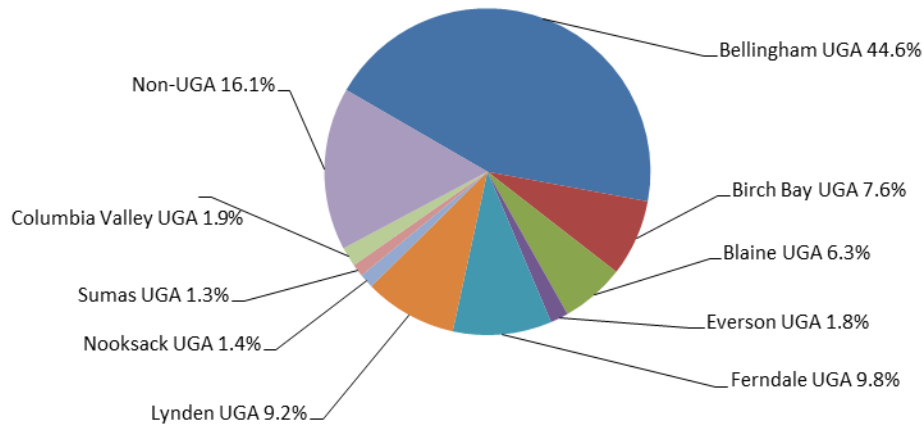


The charts below show the total growth each area captured over the last five years and the planned growth share from the County Comprehensive Plan. For example, State OFM estimates that Bellingham experienced 42.4% of the total County growth over the last five years, while the County Comprehensive Plan assumed that Bellingham would experience 44.6% of the County-wide growth over the planning period.

Estimated Growth Share 2013-2018 (Based on State data)



County Comprehensive Plan Allocated 2013-36 Growth Share



Overall, the State OFM estimates indicate that recent growth in UGAs has been below that projected in the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan. In the last five years only the Lynden UGA has seen population growth higher than the growth projected in the Comprehensive Plan. The five-year population growth for the area outside UGAs is the difference between OFM’s estimated total Whatcom County growth and OFM estimates for all UGAs. Using this method, the estimated population growth for the areas outside UGAs over the last five years (3,826) is above the Comprehensive Plan’s pro-rated projection for five years (2,438).

III. BUILDING PERMIT-BASED ESTIMATES

This method estimates population by calculating the net gain in permitted dwelling units (new units completed minus units demolished) and multiplying the net gain by occupancy rate and persons-per-household figures.

Non-Urban Growth Estimate. Multiplying the net gain of dwelling units by the rural occupancy rate of 82% and the persons-per-household figure of 2.73, derived from OFM information for 2017-18, the non-UGA population growth is estimated at 401 persons between April 1, 2017 and March 31, 2018. Figure 4 below provides estimates for growth outside UGAs between 2013 and 2018.

Figure 4. Population Growth Estimates (Outside UGAs) - Based on Building Permit Data									
Year	Single Family Final	Mobile Home Final	Duplex Final	Single Family Demo	Net Unit Gain	Persons/ Household	Occupancy Rate	Estimated Population Growth	Allocated Population Growth
2013-14	124	24	0	23	125	2.73	82.07%	280	488
2014-15	123	41	1	19	146	2.73	82.07%	327	488
2015-16	158	19	4	17	164	2.73	82.07%	367	488
2016-17	168	18	2	11	177	2.73	82.07%	397	488
2017-18	174	22	2	19	179	2.73	82.07%	401	488
Totals	747	124	9	89	791	2.73	82.07%	1,772	2,438

The planned non-UGA population growth in the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan is 11,217 over the 23 years between 2013 and 2036. This equates to about 488 persons annually or 2,438 over a five-year period. The estimated 2017-18 population growth of 401 persons falls below the annual allocation.

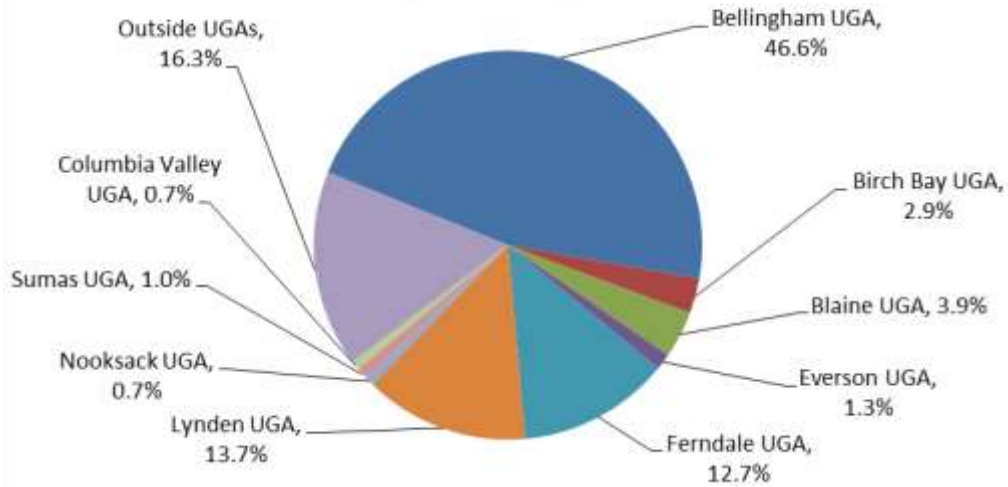
Using this method, the estimated annual growth outside UGAs has been below the 488-person annual allocation in each of the past five years. The cumulative estimated growth of 1,772 persons from 2013-2018 is below the allocated growth of 2,438 persons for those five years.

Urban Growth Area Estimates. Growth in the urban areas was estimated by adding OFM's data for net gains in dwelling units in the cities (single-family, multi-family, and mobile homes) to the County's figures for net dwelling unit gains in unincorporated UGAs, and multiplied by occupancy rate and persons-per-household stats for each area (see Figure 5).

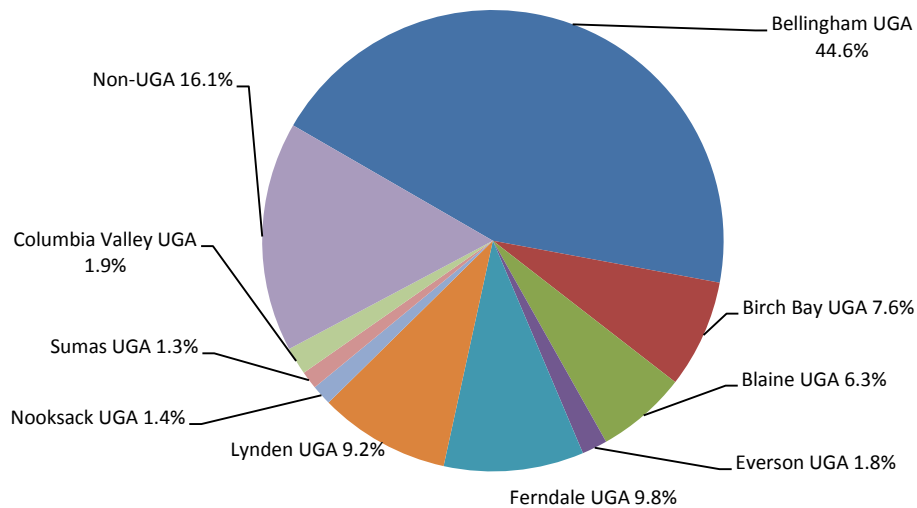
Figure 5. Population Growth Estimates (UGAs) - Based on Building Permit Data						
	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	Totals
Bellingham UGA	330	848	1,078	1,378	1,425	5,060
Birch Bay UGA	34	60	68	63	92	316
Blaine UGA	103	45	42	70	164	424
Everson UGA	14	14	17	26	73	145
Ferndale UGA	493	199	279	225	181	1,376
Lynden UGA	275	196	313	216	485	1,485
Nooksack UGA	24	26	12	12	6	79
Sumas UGA	13	8	13	37	39	109
Columbia Valley UGA	9	13	11	18	31	81
Outside UGAs	280	327	367	397	401	1,772
Total	1,575	1,737	2,201	2,441	2,895	10,848

Source: State OFM housing data (incorporated areas) and Whatcom County permit records (unincorporated areas). Data are for April 1 to March 31.

Estimated 2013-2018 Growth Share (Permits)



WCCP Allocated 2013-36 Growth Share

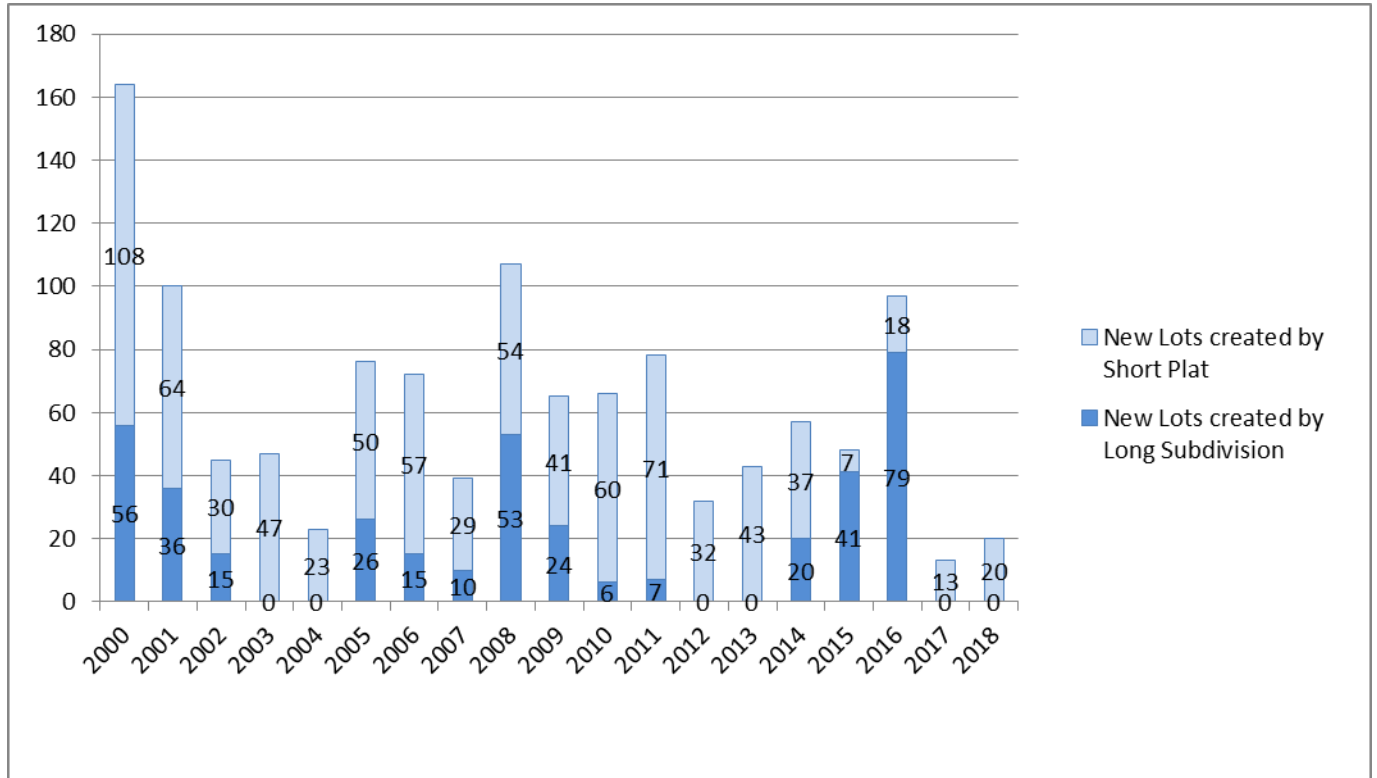


The permit-based method yields significantly lower growth estimates than the OFM-based estimates. The OFM method uses a variety of factors of which building permit data is only one. The permit-based estimates are the most useful in gauging development activity.

IV. NON-URBAN SUBDIVISION ACTIVITY

A less direct indicator of non-urban growth trends is the number of new lots created outside UGAs through long and short subdivision plats (see Figure 6). Between 2014 and 2018 a total of 235 new lots were created, an average of about 47 per year.¹

Figure 6. New Lots Created By Non-Urban Subdivisions



NOTES:

In 2016, 58 of the 79 lots created by long subdivision were in the Point Roberts limited area of more intensive rural development (LAMIRD).

In 2018, 7 of the 20 lots created are not eligible for a new single family residence because they are in agricultural short plats (WCC 20.40.250).

¹ County subdivision records, using UGA boundaries at time of subdivision. New lots are total lots minus the original existing lot.

V. CONCLUSION

Over the last five years, estimated growth in most of the UGAs has been less than allocated in the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan, while estimated growth outside the UGAs is either below or above the allocation for non-urban growth depending on which estimation method is used. Using the OFM method, non-urban growth accounts for 26.3% of the estimated countywide growth in the five years between April 1, 2013 and April 1, 2018. Using the building permit method, estimated non-urban growth accounted for 16.3% of countywide growth in those same five years.

Of the two methods used in this report, the building permit method more directly addresses the overarching purpose of non-urban growth monitoring, which is to track how much development is occurring outside UGAs. This method indicates that residential development outside the UGAs is not taking place at a pace that exceeds the growth allocations of the Comprehensive Plan. The number of new lots created in the non-urban areas also suggests a modest rate of development in the non-urban areas.