

Chapter Three  
Housing

1  
2  
3  
4 **Introduction**

5 Housing is not only a basic human need; it is a fundamental building block in the  
6 development of strong communities. The quality, price and availability of housing  
7 have far reaching effects. Housing is an issue of equity, and a healthy community  
8 strives to provide housing affordable to households at all income levels.

9 Every community and neighborhood needs a healthy mix of housing sizes, types  
10 and prices, affordable at the wages of the jobs nearby. A balanced mix will have  
11 housing costs in sync with wages and incomes.

12 **Purpose**

13 The purpose of this housing element is to consider future needs for housing in  
14 Whatcom County by examining existing housing patterns, projected population  
15 growth, and most-likely growth scenarios, and to suggest realistic ways to provide  
16 for those housing needs within the wishes of county ~~residents~~ ~~citizens~~, sound public  
17 policy, and within the mandates of the Washington State Growth Management Act  
18 (GMA). ~~First, the number, type, and condition of housing units in place today must~~  
19 ~~be compared with current housing needs. Second, future housing needs must be~~  
20 ~~proposed based on expected needs of identifiable social and economic groups.~~  
21 ~~Third, future housing needs must be addressed through a package of incentives,~~  
22 ~~local requirements, and regulations that encourage development of housing that~~  
23 ~~matches the incomes of citizens throughout the county.~~

24 **Process**

25 ~~In 2004 and 2009, the Housing Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan has been~~  
26 ~~updated, adding new information and updated data to the chapter produced in the~~  
27 ~~mid-1990s. The earlier chapter was produced through the efforts of the Residents'~~  
28 ~~Housing Advisory Committee (RHAC). The committee was formed and appointed~~  
29 ~~by, the Whatcom County Executive, in September 1993. Members included~~  
30 ~~representatives of the building industry, of special needs groups, of Christian, AIDS~~  
31 ~~and other advocate groups, and an attorney. The RHAC met every month, and~~  
32 ~~frequently more than once per month. The focus on identification of key issues,~~  
33 ~~development of goals and policies, and careful framing of action plans. Two~~  
34 ~~members were delegated by the committee to sit on the GMA Coordinating~~  
35 ~~Committee to review all comprehensive plan chapters for consistency. When the~~  
36 ~~RHAC completed its tasks in June 1994, those two members continued making~~  
37 ~~valuable contributions to the work of the Coordinating Committee. The RHAC sent~~  
38 ~~the final version of the chapter to Planning Commission for review.~~

1 **GMA Goals ~~and~~, County~~w~~-Wide Planning Policies, ~~and~~ Visioning Community**  
2 **Value Statements**

3 Realization of all the thirteen Growth Management Act goals is fostered by the  
4 goals, policies, and action plans in this chapter. Those directly relating to housing  
5 will be met with successful adoption of this comprehensive plan chapter. This  
6 chapter has been written to satisfy those goals while also meeting the intent of the  
7 County-Wide Planning Policies (CWPP) and general guidelines of Visioning  
8 Community Value Statements. CWPP's direct the county and its cities to ensure a  
9 balance of housing and economic growth consistent with diverse income levels and  
10 allowing for a range of housing types and costs. Further, the county and cities can  
11 employ innovative techniques providing for a variety of housing types: single-  
12 family-detached, multifamily building for both ownership and rental, accessory  
13 dwelling units (~~Ado's~~ADUs), manufactured and modular homes, manufactured and  
14 mobile home parks, along with mixed use and increased densities as affordable  
15 housing alternatives. Visioning Community Value Statements identify the  
16 importance of affordable housing and encourage even distribution of housing  
17 affordability and a mix of housing types throughout the county. Growth  
18 Management goals, Visioning Community Value Statements, and County-Wide  
19 Planning Policies will be served by adoption and implementation of this chapter.

20 **GMA Requirements**

21 ~~The Growth Management Act mandates that counties required to plan under the act~~  
22 ~~adopt comprehensive plans that "encourage the availability of affordable housing to~~  
23 ~~all segments of the population of this state, promote a variety of residential~~  
24 ~~densities and housing types, and encourage preservation of existing housing stock."~~  
25 ~~(RCW 36.70A.020 (4))~~

26 In accordance with RCW 36.70A.070 the Growth Management Act requires that a  
27 housing element:

- 28 a. Includes an inventory and analysis of existing and projected housing needs  
29 that identifies the number of housing units necessary to manage projected  
30 growth;
- 31 b. Includes a statement of goals, policies, objectives, and mandatory provisions  
32 for the preservation, improvement, and development of housing, including  
33 single-family residences;
- 34 c. Identifies sufficient land for housing, including, but not limited to,  
35 government-assisted housing, housing for low-income families, manufactured  
36 housing, multi-family housing, and group homes and foster care facilities;  
37 and
- 38 d. Makes adequate provisions for existing and projected housing needs of all  
39 economic segments of the community.

40 **Background Summary**

41  
42 Comprehensive plans have been developed for Whatcom County and each of the  
43 cities that lie within its boundaries. Each of these plans contains a housing element

1 that addresses the housing needs of each jurisdiction and offers suggestions for  
2 changes that could occur to help meet these needs.

3 This chapter will overlap many of the ideas put forth in those plans—the problems  
4 perceived in each community, their changing demographics, and the directions the  
5 communities seem willing to go to improve the overall situation. It also incorporates  
6 a recent study, the *Whatcom County Housing Analysis 2015*. ~~It also incorporates~~  
7 ~~other recent studies of Whatcom County, such as *Community Counts: Whatcom*~~  
8 ~~*County Health Indicator Report 2002* and the *Whatcom Real Estate Research*~~  
9 ~~*Report*.~~

## 10 Demographic Overview

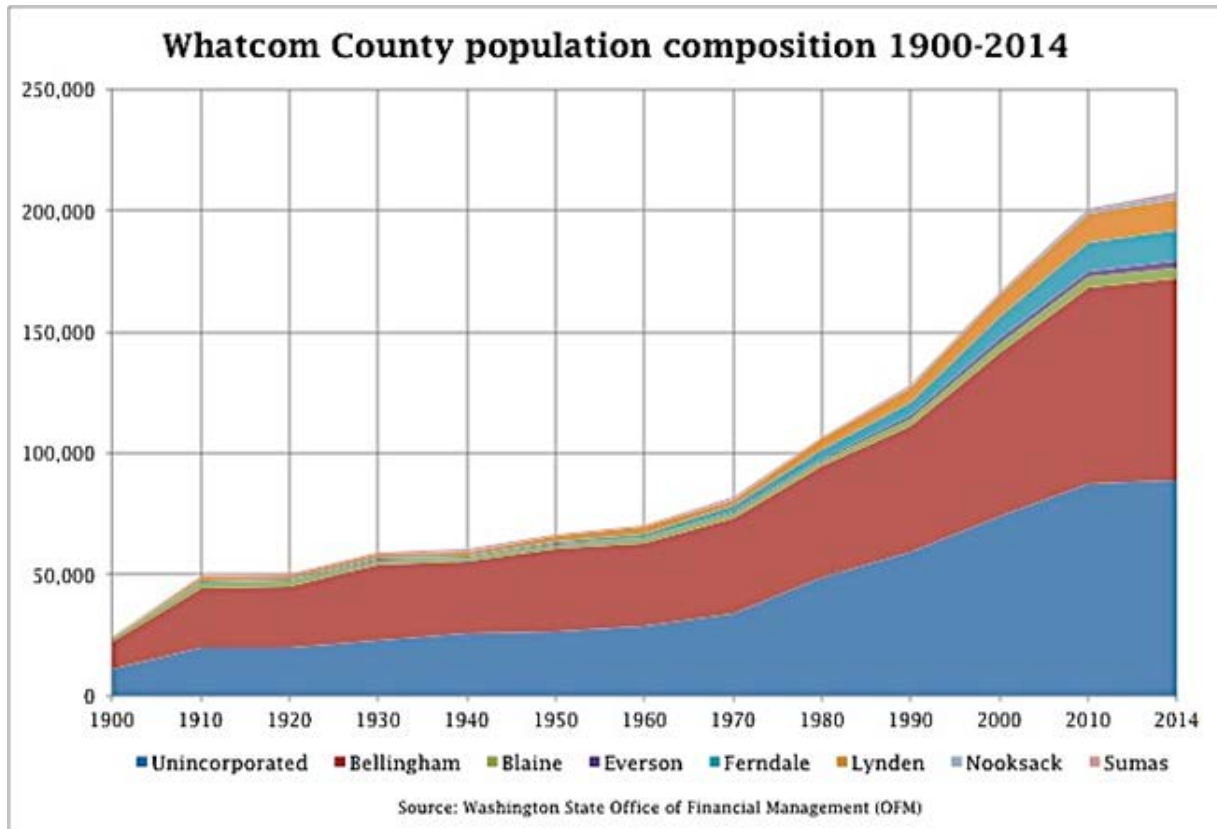
11 Whatcom County demographics in general are similar to Puget Sound within the  
12 municipal jurisdictions (Bellingham in particular), reflecting the county's continuing  
13 urbanization along the I-5 corridor. Western Washington University, Port of  
14 Bellingham, Cherry Point, and other major regional enterprises have influenced  
15 employment, housing, services, and other facilities that have attracted age-specific  
16 populations and households.

17 Even so, Whatcom County in total is less urban than Puget Sound with more base  
18 industry (agriculture, forestry, and manufacturing) employment, lower incomes,  
19 highlower housing costs, and less ethnic, non-English speaking populations.

20 Specific jurisdictions within Whatcom County reflect the iterative influence of age  
21 and household-specific relationships to employment, housing, and services. Where  
22 Nooksack, for example, is predominantly married couple family, single-family  
23 housing stock, owner occupied, and car dependent; whereas Bellingham includes  
24 more non-family households, multifamily housing stock, renter occupied, and sees  
25 more bike/transit commuting.

26 Whatcom County's population is growing steadily. ~~Between 2000 and 2008 it rose~~  
27 ~~14.5% An estimated 75% of that increase is~~ A large portion of our growth  
28 is attributable to in-migration as opposed to birth rate. Washington State Office of  
29 Financial Management (OFM) projects the number of net migrants into the county  
30 will increase from 5,313 persons between 2010-2015 to 14,028 persons 2035-  
31 2040. In addition to increasing the number of people living in the County, in-  
32 migration is resulting in changes to its demographic makeup. Increased minority,  
33 retirement-age, college age and single-parent household populations characterize  
34 demographic changes resulting from in-migration.

35 Single-parent households are proportionally more sensitive than two-parent  
36 households to factors contributing to poverty and sub-standard living conditions  
37 such as housing costs, health care costs, and other increases in the cost of living.  
38 The number of such households is increasing at a faster rate than households with  
39 two parents. Shifts in proportions of various groups comprising county population  
40 also shift the need for various types and sizes of housing. Some families require  
41 larger homes to accommodate larger extended families. Some groups, such as  
42 single-parent households, require smaller and more efficient housing.



1  
2 Whatcom County's future demographics, particularly the composite social  
3 characteristics of each municipal jurisdiction, will largely depend on how specific  
4 demographic groups are attracted to each municipal jurisdiction by each  
5 jurisdiction's unique economic, land use, transportation, housing conditions, and  
6 public policy.

7 Please see *Whatcom County Housing Analysis 2015* for more information on  
8 demographics.

9 **Income Distribution**

10 ~~Fifty-one percent of Whatcom County renters put more than 30% of their income~~  
11 ~~towards housing costs in 2007, compared to 45% of renters state-wide. In 2007,~~  
12 ~~median income in Whatcom County was more than 16% below Washington State's~~  
13 ~~median income, while median gross rent was just over 9% lower.~~

<b>Table 1 2007 Household Income<sup>†</sup></b>		
<b>Income</b>	<b>Whatcom County</b>	<b>Washington</b>
Median household income	\$46,506	\$55,591
Per capita income	\$24,336	\$29,027
Median family income	\$62,948	\$66,642

1 ~~Family incomes are slightly higher than household incomes, but still lower than the~~  
2 ~~State numbers. Sixteen percent of Whatcom County's population fell below the~~  
3 ~~federal poverty level in 2007, a percentage significantly higher than Washington~~  
4 ~~State's 11%.~~

5 ~~U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 American Community Survey~~

6

<b>Table 2</b>		
<b>2007 Population Living in Poverty</b>		
<b>Population Living in Poverty</b>	<b>Whatcom County</b>	<b>Washington</b>
Total Population	16%	11.4%
Individuals 18 plus	15.5%	10.3%
Individuals 65 plus	12.7%	7.9%
Families living in poverty	8.7%	7.8%
Females with related children under 18	44.2%	34%
Females with related children under 5	79.6%	42.1%

7

8 Statistics have shown that as housing prices increased at a faster rate than  
9 household incomes, so decreased the ability of Low- to Moderate-Income (LMI)  
10 populations to obtain decent housing in Whatcom County.

- 11 • ~~Between 1999 and 2007 the median household income grew 16% while~~  
12 ~~housing costs grew 103% over the same period.<sup>2</sup>~~
- 13 • ~~In each year 1999-2007 the average wage in Whatcom County was not~~  
14 ~~enough to afford a two-bedroom rental unit.<sup>3</sup>~~
- 15 • ~~There are about 20,000 very low-income households in Whatcom County.<sup>4</sup>~~

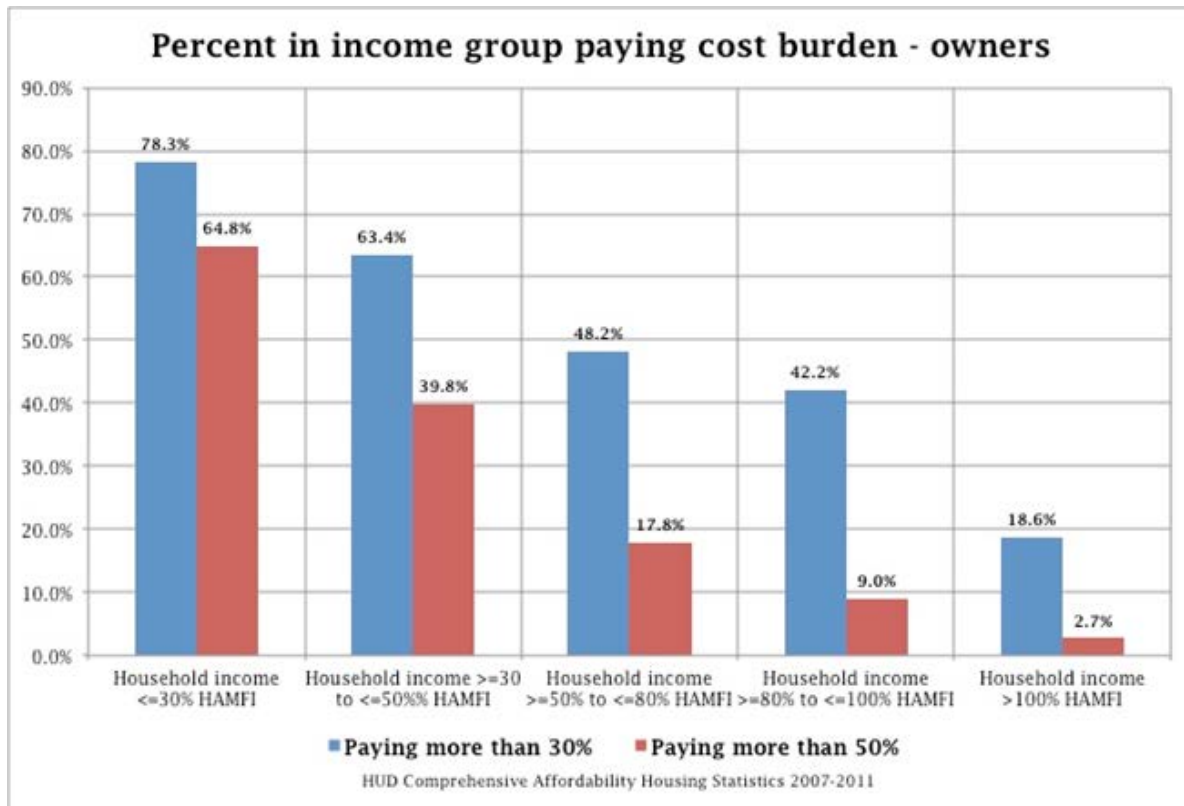
16 <sup>2</sup>-WA Center for Real Estate Research; U.S. Census Bureau

17 <sup>3</sup>-National Low Income Housing Coalition

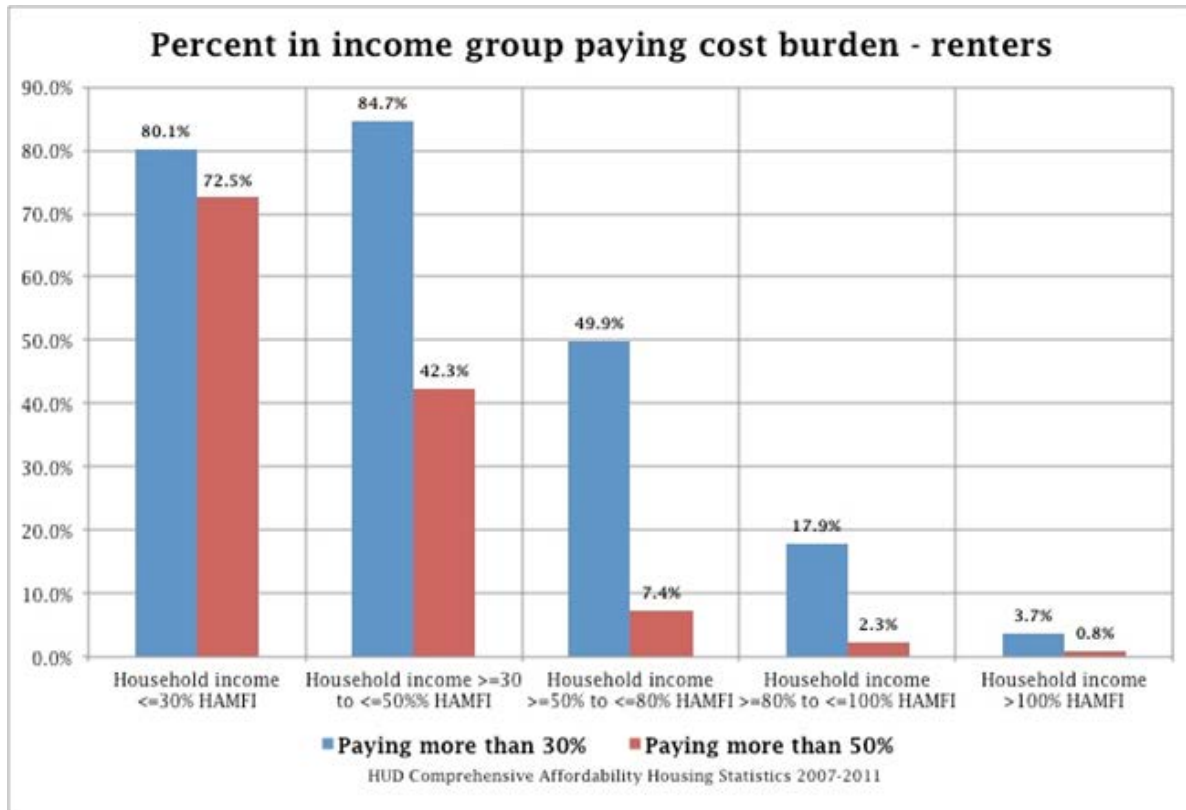
18 <sup>4</sup>-U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 American Community Survey

19

1 Significant percentages of extremely low, very low, and low-income households in  
2 Whatcom County are paying more for ownership and rent than they can feasibly  
3 afford to pay and still have sufficient income for transportation, health care,  
4 clothing, food, and the like. Housing cost burdened households are most prevalent  
5 in the lowest income groups but remain a problem in all income groups, particularly  
6 those paying more than 50% of income for housing. See the charts below for the  
7 percentage of each income group which are housing cost burdened.



8  
9



Note: HAMFI is HUD's Average Median Family Income. Please see *Whatcom County Housing Analysis 2015* for more information on income distribution and housing cost burden.

### Needs

~~With current inadequacies in federal funding,~~ Innovative housing solutions are needed to provide enough housing units to accommodate ~~all of~~ the County's growing housing needs. By the end of the 20-year planning period, Whatcom County will ~~likely have~~ experienced substantial growth.

While there are many programs that address affordable housing issues in Whatcom County, a growing number of households are in need of assistance, causing increased competition for existing resources. Many of these resources are not available to some jurisdictions that do not meet all of the necessary criteria or cannot produce the required matching funds to participate in certain programs<sup>1</sup>.

Between 1990 and 2000, Bellingham's multi-family housing experienced a 65% increase. In 2009, multi-family housing comprised 50% of the housing in the City. Concern that an increase in rental units may pose a challenge to community development has been expressed in Bellingham's Consolidated Plan, as rental tenants move frequently.<sup>2</sup>

Accommodating our future housing need will require substantial effort and planning. There is an increasing need for all forms of affordable housing including multi-family housing and smaller single-family houses constructed on smaller lots.

<sup>1</sup>Bellingham Comprehensive Plan Housing Element part IV

<sup>2</sup> Bellingham Consolidated Plan

**Market Inventory and Analysis**

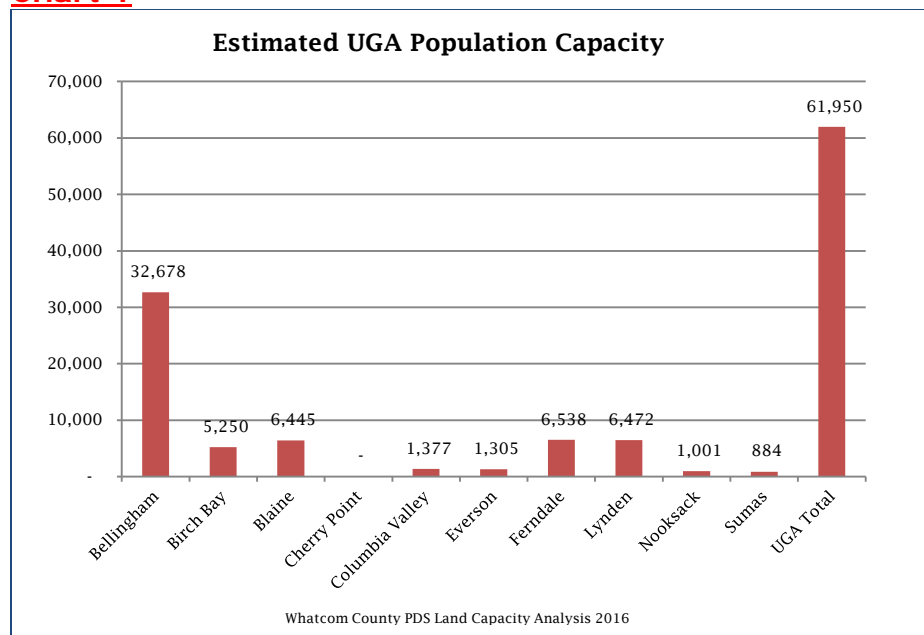
It is important to address population growth impacts and housing requirements in Whatcom County over the next 20-year planning period. Comparing the planned (allocated) growth in Table 1 with the UGA population capacities in Chart 1, and comparing the supply of single- and multi-family dwellings in Chart 2 with the projected housing needs in Chart 3, it appears Whatcom County's UGAs can accommodate both the number and types of dwellings needed in the next 20 years. It is important to note that the projected housing needs shown in Chart 3 are based on the assumption that the 2000-2013 growth distribution among housing types will continue. That distribution may change as a result of changing market conditions or jurisdictions' land use planning policy choices.

**Table 1**  
**Whatcom County population allocations 2013-2036**

<u>Urban Growth Area (UGA)</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2036</u>	<u>Projected Growth</u>	<u>% of Co. Growth</u>
<u>Bellingham</u>	<u>92,660</u>	<u>123,710</u>	<u>31,050</u>	<u>44.6%</u>
<u>Birch Bay</u>	<u>7,540</u>	<u>12,822</u>	<u>5,282</u>	<u>7.6%</u>
<u>Blaine</u>	<u>5,171</u>	<u>9,585</u>	<u>4,414</u>	<u>6.3%</u>
<u>Columbia Valley</u>	<u>3,103</u>	<u>4,448</u>	<u>1,345</u>	<u>1.9%</u>
<u>Everson</u>	<u>2,665</u>	<u>3,907</u>	<u>1,242</u>	<u>1.8%</u>
<u>Ferndale</u>	<u>12,758</u>	<u>19,591</u>	<u>6,833</u>	<u>9.8%</u>
<u>Lynden</u>	<u>12,872</u>	<u>19,275</u>	<u>6,403</u>	<u>9.2%</u>
<u>Nooksack</u>	<u>1,435</u>	<u>2,425</u>	<u>990</u>	<u>1.4%</u>
<u>Sumas</u>	<u>1,449</u>	<u>2,323</u>	<u>874</u>	<u>1.3%</u>
<u>Non-UGA</u>	<u>66,104</u>	<u>77,321</u>	<u>11,217</u>	<u>16.1%</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>205,800</b>	<b>275,450</b>	<b>69,650</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

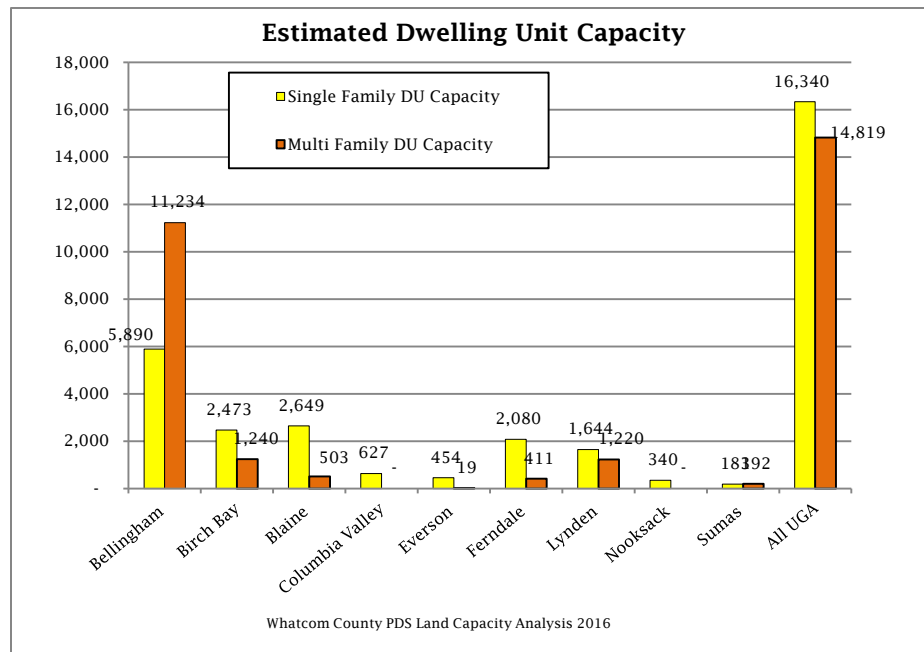
Source: 2016 proposed population allocations. 2013 and 2036 totals include existing population in the Cherry Point Major Port Industrial UGA, to which no population growth is allocated.

**Chart 1**



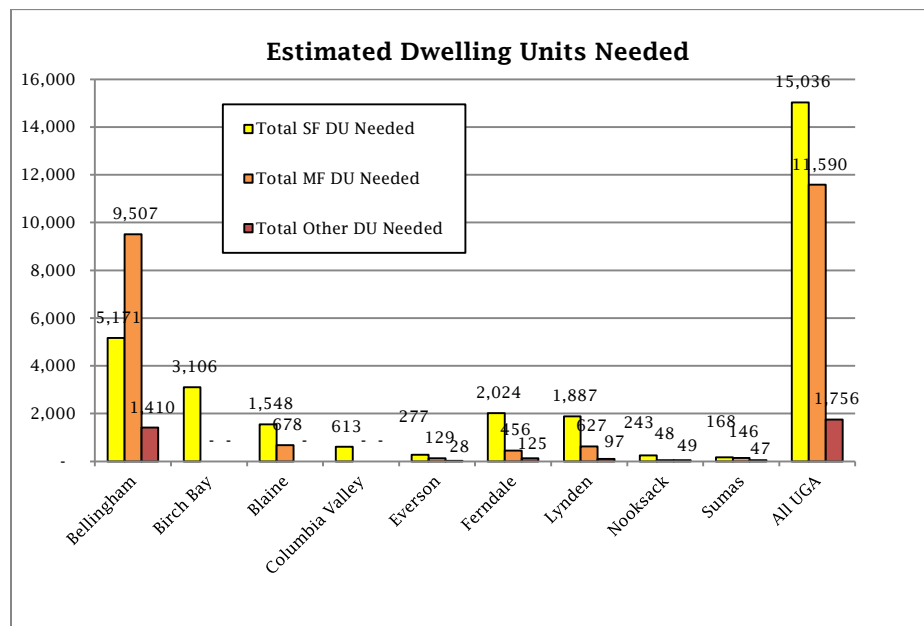


1 **Chart 2**



2

3 **Chart 3**



4

5 **OFM 2000-2013 Housing Permit Data; WCCP Population Growth Projections**

6 **Unaffordable Housing**

7

8 The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines unaffordable  
9 housing as that which places a cost burden of greater than 30% on a household's

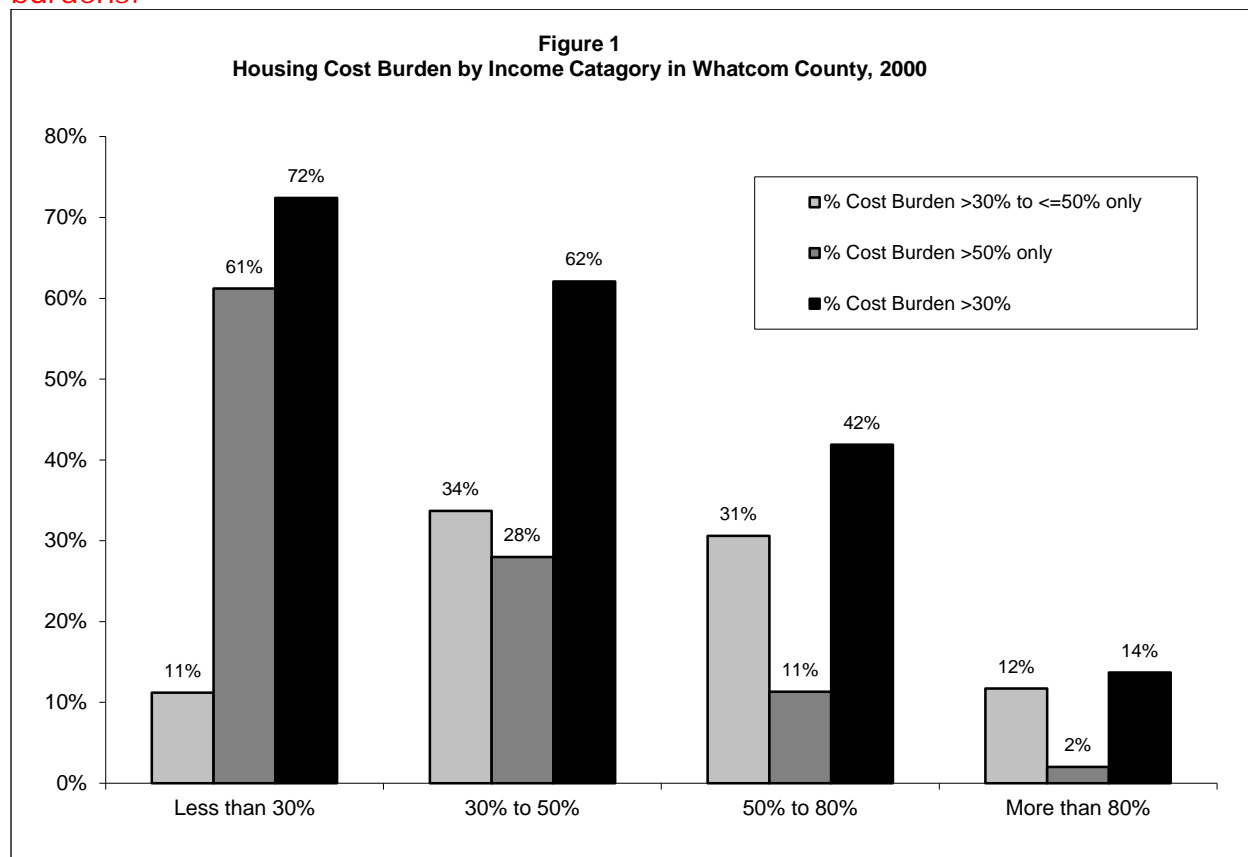
1 ~~income. Forty-two percent of Whatcom County households put more than 30% of~~  
 2 ~~their income towards housing costs in the year 2007. This cost burden is most~~  
 3 ~~detrimental for those in the lower income categories, but its negative effects are~~  
 4 ~~felt well into the middle-income range.~~

<b>Table 3</b>			
<b>Unaffordable Units in Whatcom County</b>			
<b>Whatcom County Housing Units</b>	<b>Owner Occupied</b>	<b>Renter Occupied</b>	<b>Total</b>
Unaffordable Units*	16,618	14,394	31,552
Total Units	46,474	29,285	75,759

\*Unaffordable defined as units that require housing payments greater than 30% of household income.

Source: US Census, 2007 American Community Survey

5  
 6 ~~Households with incomes at less than 30% of the area median income are the~~  
 7 ~~hardest hit—61% of them putting more than 50% of their income toward housing~~  
 8 ~~costs. As seen in Figure 2, the next two income categories also experience~~  
 9 ~~significant housing affordability problems with 62% and 42% experiencing cost~~  
 10 ~~burdens.~~



11

**Housing Mismatch**

Part of the problem is the disparity that exists between the number of lower-income households in the county and the number of housing units that are affordable to these households. HUD calls this the “housing mismatch” and derives a functional data set of this mismatched data from each U.S. Census.

The number of housing units affordable to each income group does not properly match the number of households. There were more housing units available in the 50% to 80% income category in 2000 than there were households, implying that households in lower and higher income categories must be occupying a significant portion of these units. Whatcom County currently needs housing units for households in the lowest income category.

A July 2008 Countywide Housing Action Plan extrapolated to 2025 the number of households with extreme housing burden — those paying more than 50% of their income for housing, and earning under 80% of the area median income — putting the number at 14,193, which is a 62% increase above 2000. This is an increase at a rate faster than population growth if present trends continue — meaning the housing crisis will get worse over time.<sup>7</sup>

Thirty-six of Whatcom County homeowners put more than 30% of their income into their housing costs in 2007 (up from 15% in 1989 and 26% in 1999)<sup>8</sup> and it has been estimated that renters spend 55% of their income on housing.

<sup>7</sup> Countywide Housing Action Plan submitted by the Countywide Housing Affordability Task Force July 18, 2008

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Census

<b>Table 4 Housing Costs 2007</b>		
<b>Cost by Type</b>	<b>Whatcom County</b>	<b>Washington</b>
<b>Selected owner costs</b>		
30% of income plus	35.8%	33.4%
<b>Selected renter costs</b>		
30% of income plus	51.0%	44.8%
Median value owner-occupied	\$300,800	\$305,500
<b>Median owner costs</b>		
With mortgage	\$1,532	\$1,675
Not mortgage	\$439	\$453
Median gross rent	\$739	\$816

Source: US Census, 2007 American Community Survey

The median value of an owner-occupied house in Whatcom County increased 95% between 2000 and 2007.

<b>Table 5</b> <b>Median Price of Houses Sold in Whatcom County</b> <b>1980-2007</b>					
<b>Year</b>	<b>Median Price</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Median Price</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Median Price</b>
1980	\$49,700	1990	\$86,350	2000	\$146,500
1981	n/a	1991	\$98,250	2001	\$152,600
1982	\$56,000	1992	\$112,000	2002	\$159,100
1983	\$54,000	1993	\$120,000	2003	\$176,700
1984	\$54,441	1994	\$125,800	2004	\$216,800
1985	\$52,600	1995	\$127,000	2005	\$265,000
1986	\$54,000	1996	\$131,800	2006	\$282,300
1987	\$55,500	1997	\$133,700	2007	\$290,000
1988	\$59,500	1998	\$138,900		
1989	\$67,450	1999	\$143,100		

Source: Whatcom County Real Estate Research Report

- 1
- 2 **Currently Available Low Income Affordable Housing**
- 3 Various subsidized housing exists in all of the cities in the County. Small-scale
- 4 affordable housing projects are located in each city.
- 5 The Whatcom/Skagit Homes program funded by USDA Rural Development is
- 6 available in rural parts of the County. Habitat for Humanity of Whatcom County
- 7 builds single family homes affordable to very low income homebuyers. Kulshan
- 8 Community Land Trust provides affordable homeownership opportunities that
- 9 remain affordable for each successive owner of the CLT homes. Mobile and
- 10 manufactured homes are allowed in designated areas (usually mobile home parks)
- 11 throughout the County and often provide housing to low-income populations.
- 12 The Bellingham/Whatcom Housing Authorities owns and/or manages 1,712
- 13 subsidized units that house families, the elderly and disabled people. They also
- 14 have 1,891 Shelter Plus Care and Section 8 rental assistance vouchers distributed
- 15 throughout the County. Although the Bellingham/Whatcom Housing Authorities
- 16 facilitates the provision of a total of 3,603 subsidized housing units, they do not
- 17 receive enough funding to provide housing assistance to all of the families in need
- 18 in the County. Most of the funding they do receive cannot be recaptured.
- 19 In addition to this, the City of Bellingham's housing programs, using federal funds,
- 20 include rehabilitation of existing housing units, acquisition of housing units or land
- 21 for housing, new construction, assistance to homebuyers, rental assistance to
- 22 tenants and assistance to homeless households and those at risk of becoming
- 23 homeless.
- 24 Several other organizations, including the Archdiocesan Housing Authority and
- 25 Intercommunity Mercy Housing, own and manage nonprofit rental housing
- 26 affordable to low-income households.

1 ~~The Whatcom County Health Department conducted a detailed inventory of~~  
2 ~~affordable housing resources in August 2007 and determined the total number of~~  
3 ~~public and nonprofit affordable housing units included 4,901 housing units equal to~~  
4 ~~9,877 bedrooms.~~

<b>Housing Type</b>	<b># Bedrooms</b>	<b># Utilities</b>
Rental housing units	5,229	2,861
Permanent Rental assistance-housing vouchers	3,511	1,620
Homeownership assistance	175	89
Permanent supportive housing	219	185
Emergency shelter and transitional housing	743	146
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,877</b>	<b>4,901</b>

5  
6 **Other Subsidized Housing**

7  
8 ~~The federal government expends billions of dollars each year in tax breaks and~~  
9 ~~mortgage interest deductions—all government subsidies on housing that~~  
10 ~~disproportionately serve high income populations.~~

11 ~~The federal government spends more on these subsidies each year than it allocates~~  
12 ~~to the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Federal benefits to renters~~  
13 ~~—including low income housing tax credits and HUD direct expenditures to fund~~  
14 ~~subsidized housing throughout the country—totaled under \$50 billion.~~

15 **Issues, Goals, and Policies**

16 In order to offer appropriate and affordable housing for everyone in the County,  
17 programs and policies designed to meet a variety of housing needs can be  
18 implemented. With the right mix of policy decisions and local programs, we can  
19 increase the supply of affordable housing and offer a variety of housing choices,  
20 thereby strengthening our communities. Thousands of Whatcom County households  
21 do not live in affordable housing. Looking ahead, the incomes of working people in  
22 Whatcom County will make affordability one of the County's biggest challenges.  
23 Both public and private investments can be directed into housing that ensures that  
24 low- to moderate-income people will be able to continue to live near where they  
25 work in the community. (According to the US Department of Housing and Urban  
26 Development, in 2015, in Whatcom County a family of four earning \$54,100 was  
27 considered low-income, while the median income for a family of four was \$67,600).

28 **Adopting an Ambitious but Achievable Affordable Housing ~~Vision~~ Goal to**  
29 **achieve an adequate supply of housing types that are affordable.**

30 Whatcom County and its cities might consider adopting a HOUSING ~~VISION~~GOAL  
31 that sets the bar at a high but achievable level:

32

1 *“By the year 20~~36~~20, every community and neighborhood has a healthy mix of*  
2 *housing sizes, types and prices, affordable at the wages of the jobs nearby. A*  
3 *balanced mix of housing will have housing costs in sync with wages and incomes in*  
4 *the community.”*

5 To achieve this overarching vision goal, the following goals, and policies ~~and actions~~  
6 are adopted:

### 7 **Permitting Process Efficiency**

8 Building codes and zoning ordinances, in part, influence costs of development and  
9 construction of housing. The permitting processes require time (raising finance  
10 costs), fees, and the personal time investment of parties involved. Building plan  
11 reviews increase cost and time. Local plans checking of non-commercial  
12 development by county officials could save time and money. A budget that allows  
13 adequate staff is necessary to minimize processing time. Also, to the extent  
14 possible, regulatory predictability and certainty in the processes required of the  
15 private sector will contribute to its willingness to contribute to housing affordability.

16 **Goal 3A: Minimize the time required for processing housing-**  
17 **related development and construction permits in the**  
18 **interest of overall cost reduction.**

19 Policy 3A-1: Streamline and simplify existing and proposed permitting  
20 processes.

21 Policy 3A-2: Educate interested parties in the permitting processes es required  
22 for land use actions using easy to understand publications such  
23 as brochures, ~~or~~ handouts, workshops and websites readily  
24 available to the public.

25 Policy 3A-3: Consistently apply the International Building Codes ~~and do not~~  
26 increase requirements.

### 27 **Mixed Land Uses with Appropriate Buffering and Siting Criteria**

28 Where feasible, mixed land uses should be encouraged. The concept of encouraging  
29 housing near employment and siting employment near the work force is well-  
30 accepted and logical. Housing, transportation, and employment-base needs are  
31 well-served by this proximity; it is desirable from public, employer, employee, and  
32 public service perspectives. Incompatible uses such as heavy, noisy, or noxious  
33 industrial facilities adjacent to residential uses should continue to be discouraged.  
34 Some non-polluting, low-impact types of light industrial uses such as ~~textile~~  
35 manufacturing computer or medical equipment assembly, which could be large-scale  
36 but not environmentally or aesthetically offensive, could, with some buffering, be  
37 perfectly acceptable and probably desirable near residential development. Design  
38 standards and funding sources will be needed to fully explore the potential for  
39 mixed use since, in some instances, ~~and~~ lenders are reluctant participants in mixed-use  
40 projects.

1 County-Wide Planning Policies, Visioning Community Value Statements,  
2 preservation of agricultural lands and environmentally sensitive areas, the  
3 comprehensive plan, and zoning regulations generally prescribe preferred locations  
4 for housing a growing population of county residents. Various levels of affordability  
5 and types of housing are needed and must be somehow blended into locational  
6 constraints.

7 Subsidized housing, homeless housing, transient, emergency, and special needs  
8 housing are all part of the affordability riddle, and in some instances a major part.  
9 ResidentsCitizens currently possessing safe and decent housing may not fully  
10 understand the scope of the housing problem and they may tend not to want  
11 housing for less advantaged households near them. In that regard, the location of  
12 affordable housing can be as difficult an issue as funding. Many people who do not  
13 want rural sprawl also do not want in-fill near them.

14 **Goal 3B: Support residential housing near employment**  
15 **opportunities and transit.**

16 Policy 3B-1: Enable and support housing development opportunities integral  
17 with, and near, compatible industrial and commercial activities  
18 and transit.

19 Policy 3B-2: Establish commercial zoning regulations that accommodate  
20 residential uses at a density higher than surrounding residential  
21 or rural zoning provided adequate transportation access and  
22 services are available.

23 Policy 3B-3: Establish industrial zoning regulations that accommodate  
24 temporary residential uses at a density higher than surrounding  
25 residential or rural zoning provided adequate transportation  
26 access is available.

27 Policy 3B-4: Residential development adjacent to major transportation routes  
28 may require buffering.

29 **Goal 3C: Create opportunity for a broad range of housing types**  
30 **and encourage mixed affordability.**

31 Policy 3C-1: Support lot clustering, varied lot sizes, small-scale multi-family  
32 dwellings, accessory housing, especially accessory dwelling units  
33 (ADUs) in single-family zoning, and reductions in infrastructure  
34 requirements for subdivisions as incentives for development of  
35 housing obtainable by purchasers with the greatest possible mix  
36 of needs and household incomes.

37 Policy 3C-2: Support programs in which residentsetizens participate in the  
38 construction of their own home.

39

1 Policy 3C-3: Support development of manufactured and mobile home parks  
2 and establish design criteria that will enable them to fit into the  
3 surrounding community.

4 Policy 3C-4: Develop zoning criteria in order to appropriately site group  
5 homes and accessory dwelling units within county residential  
6 urban growth areas.

7 ~~Policy 3C-5: Review any changes to regulations affecting the provision of~~  
8 ~~housing for current housing preferences and needs.~~

9 ~~Policy 3C-6: In UGAs, consider easing lot consolidation criteria, increasing~~  
10 ~~density, and decreasing minimum lot sizes, in the interest of~~  
11 ~~servicing housing affordability.~~

12 ~~Policy 3C-7: Coordinate with the cities to ensure efficient development in~~  
13 ~~UGAs including, for example, appropriate public utility extension~~  
14 ~~and annexation policies, and consideration of cost allocation to~~  
15 ~~provide urban capital facilities.~~

16 ~~Policy 3C-8: Encourage adequate urban land supply to provide for a broad~~  
17 ~~range of housing types commensurate with residential market~~  
18 ~~demand.~~

## 19 Access to Housing

20 Changing demographics demand flexibility in siting, regulating, and designing  
21 future housing stocks. Family size, household size, proximity to employment and  
22 services, living space requirements due to cultural preferences, immigration  
23 patterns, and other factors contribute to changes in the type, number, and location  
24 of housing opportunities required for the future. The demographic makeup of  
25 Whatcom County's population can logically be expected to change over time  
26 through the 20-year Growth Management Act planning period.

27 ~~Availability of housing for seniors, young adults, single parents, and groups is~~  
28 ~~frequently overlooked by both the private development sector and the public sector.~~  
29 ~~In addition, many migrant farm workers entering the county each season face~~  
30 ~~substandard housing and homelessness.~~ While the upper ends of the housing scale  
31 are normally well-served by the developers of housing projects, other housing  
32 needs are frequently overlooked or neglected. Making housing affordable and  
33 accessible in all residential areas will help integrate these groups of people into the  
34 larger community.

35 Housing appropriate for those with temporary, transitional, emergency, and special  
36 needs is available only on an exceptional basis. Population growth will directly affect  
37 the number of people seeking such shelter.

38 ~~A portion of the agricultural workers have difficulty in obtaining adequate housing.~~  
39 Prior to adoption of the comprehensive plan, Whatcom County considered ordinance



1 amendments allowing for easier and better provision of migrant worker housing.  
2 Difficult issues associated with the amendments such as water, sewer, and other  
3 health concerns caused them to be tabled while an accessory housing ordinance  
4 allowing development of detached second dwelling units was adopted.  
5 Nevertheless, those farm worker housing amendments must proceed to provide  
6 some relief for this important housing need.

7 | **Goal 3D:**                    **Encourage adequate provision of housing types at every**  
8    **income level.**

9 | Policy 3D-1:                    Participate with other local, state, and federal agencies, non-  
10 |    profit organizations, and jurisdictions to provide housing options  
11 |    for all income levels by considering donating land, providing  
12 |    expertise, expediting permits, and other appropriate  
13 |    mechanisms.

14 | Policy 3D-2:                    Enable the ability of the farmer to provide housing for all  
15 |    agricultural workers.

16 | Policy 3D-3:                    Support programs which assist agricultural workers seeking  
17 |    affordable housing opportunities.

18 | Policy 3D-4:                    Consider establishing a housing development fund, accessible to  
19 |    individuals qualified for affordable housing assistance who are  
20 |    legal residents of the county, administered by an agency and  
21 |    funded by contributions from developers wishing to utilize  
22 |    affordable housing incentives and bonuses, but not wishing to  
23 |    include affordable housing in the project receiving the incentives  
24 |    or bonuses.

25 | **Goal 3E:**                    **Provide for future housing needs by responding to**  
26 |    **changing household demographics.**

27 | Policy 3E-1:                    Review and revise existing regulations to identify inhibitions to  
28 |    housing for the varying preferences of those needing housing.  
29 |    Focus on population segments with particular needs such as  
30 |    temporary, transitional, or emergency housing.

31 | Policy 3E-2:                    Evaluate all new regulations or codes developed at the county  
32 |    level to ensure they accommodate housing preferences and  
33 |    needs existing at that time.

34 | Policy 3E-3:                    Encourage financial institutions to participate in creative housing  
35 |    solutions which respond to changing demographics and needs.

36 | Policy 3E-4:                    Support the development of housing specifically for young  
37 |    adults, seniors, groups, and single parents.

38

1 **Incentives for Affordability**

2 Profit generally drives the production of most housing. Some types of housing,  
3 particularly some of the more affordable types, are less profitable to build. If the  
4 private sector is expected to play a part in the provision of affordable, obtainable  
5 housing, there must be incentives encouraging them to do so.

6 **Goal 3F: Provide incentives to create affordable housing.**

7 Policy 3F-1: Include incentives ~~density or inclusionary bonus provisions~~ in  
8 land use regulations, in UGAs and in Planned Unit Developments  
9 (PUDs), to offset the reduced profit inherent in more affordable  
10 types of housing. ~~These bonuses may be transferred to other~~  
11 ~~locations.~~ Incentives might include transfer of development  
12 rights, density bonuses, fee waivers, expedited permit review,  
13 and/or infrastructure concessions to protect developers  
14 wherever special needs populations are specifically served.

15 Policy 3F-2: Review accessory housing regulations~~ordinances~~ for  
16 effectiveness and appropriateness and revise when necessary.

17 Policy 3F-3: Support innovative housing ideas including co-housing  
18 (essentially a micro-community with some centralized facilities),  
19 elder cottages (~~temporary~~ housing units for healthy but aging  
20 family members), accessory dwelling units (ADUs) in single  
21 family zoning of all jurisdictions, including cottage designs  
22 available at planning department front desk, and shared living  
23 residences or group quarters in UGAs, and educate the public  
24 about them.

25 Policy 3F-4: Support existing agencies which provide for, or provide  
26 assistance in obtaining, low- or no-interest loans for those  
27 needing assistance to purchase homes.

28 Policy 3F-5: Study the new innovative programs and policies in other urban  
29 areas within our region, particularly Seattle, Portland and  
30 Vancouver BC, relating to the use of ADUs and Detached  
31 Accessory Dwelling Units (DADUs).

32 Policy 3F-6: Develop outreach materials that explain the advantages to the  
33 community of ADUs and DADUs such as the ability for residents  
34 to derive supplemental income, to age-in-place, provide  
35 accommodation for an aging parents and the reduction of the  
36 tax burden that results when the cost of providing public  
37 services is shared across a larger number of residents etc.

38

1 Policy 3F-7: Work with the cities to develop ADU and DADU policies and  
2 programs that encourage infill within urban areas where  
3 transportation, public facilities, and utilities already exist.

4 Policy 3F-8: Explore and consider various financial incentives and funds to  
5 support affordable housing.

## 6 **Regulatory Controls**

7 Many forces act to inhibit the availability of affordable housing. Among these are  
8 regulatory controls, including zoning, subdivision regulations, development  
9 standards, and critical areas requirements. In addition, growth management itself  
10 implies some restrictions to affordable housing, by excluding land from  
11 development by focusing growth in urban areas, avoiding environmentally sensitive  
12 areas, and other ways. Mechanisms are needed to balance these inhibitions to  
13 affordability, such as design variety promoted through covenants, conditions, and  
14 restrictions, relaxed infrastructure requirements, and zoning.

### 15 **Goal 3G: Identify and remove impediments to affordable housing.**

16 Policy 3G-1: Create opportunities to provide more affordability by relaxing or  
17 eliminating some infrastructure requirements or impact fees  
18 where it is clearly demonstrated that such action does not  
19 create a safety hazard and is not contrary to the interests of the  
20 health and well-being of county residents.

21 Policy 3G-2: Review and revise existing and proposed regulations for  
22 consistency with other housing goals.

23 Policy 3G-3: Educate the public on equal opportunity laws specifically related  
24 to housing and housing conditions including options available to  
25 anyone discriminated against.

26 Policy 3G-4: Allow development of smaller lots and creative options.

27 Policy 3G-5: Develop policies that encourage the construction of more  
28 Attached and Detached Accessory Dwelling Units in urban areas.

## 29 **Preservation of Existing Housing Stocks**

30 Destruction of existing housing units due to redevelopment may be  
31 counterproductive for housing affordability. Instead, redevelopment should be  
32 taken as an opportunity to increase affordable housing.

### 33 **Goal 3H: Facilitate maintenance and rehabilitation of existing** 34 **housing.**

35 Policy 3H-1: Wherever there is potential for destruction of existing  
36 structures, provide for preserving existing housing or creating

1 new housing, whether by incorporation into the new project,  
2 moving, or recycling.

3 Policy 3H-2: Support creation of one or more additional housing units, within  
4 permitted density, when existing housing is remodeled, or  
5 commercial or light industrial facilities are redeveloped.

6 Policy 3H-3: Identify and implement incentives to preserve and sensitively  
7 rehabilitate historic properties.

## 8 ~~Housing—Action Plan~~

9

### 10 ~~Zoning~~

11 ~~1. Amend regulations and establish criteria for appropriate development~~  
12 ~~standards to allow an appropriate mix of manufactured and mobile home~~  
13 ~~parks in certain Urban Residential (UR) zones.~~

14  
15 ~~2. Amend zoning regulations to more broadly allow child and senior day care~~  
16 ~~facilities with traffic and buffers adequately addressed.~~

17  
18 ~~3. Allow innovative housing ideas including co-housing, elder cottages, and~~  
19 ~~shared living residences or group quarters.~~

20

### 21 ~~Permitting~~

22

23 ~~4. Allow conditional occupancy by the owner of a residence under construction,~~  
24 ~~yet not ready for permanent occupancy, where health, liability, and legal~~  
25 ~~concerns have been addressed. Such occupancy would be conditioned on~~  
26 ~~identified criteria.~~

27

### 28 ~~Regulatory Review and Reform~~

29

30 ~~5. Review any changes to county regulations affecting the provision of housing~~  
31 ~~for negative influence on direct costs and on the indirect costs of permit~~  
32 ~~processing time.~~

33

34 ~~6. Review any new changes to regulations affecting the provision of housing for~~  
35 ~~population and housing preferences and needs prevailing at that time.~~

36

37 ~~7. Establish a regular periodic review schedule of policies and procedures,~~  
38 ~~including accessory housing ordinance, by Planning Commission, panel, task~~  
39 ~~force, executive review, or other methods.~~

40

41 ~~8. Adopt land use regulations and development standards which allow lot~~  
42 ~~clustering, varied lot sizes, small scale multi-family dwellings and reductions~~  
43 ~~to infrastructure requirements for subdivisions to encourage development of~~  
44 ~~housing obtainable by purchasers with the greatest mix of household~~  
45 ~~incomes.~~

- 1  
2 ~~9. Adopt land use regulations and development standards which allow~~  
3 ~~innovative housing ideas including co-housing, elder cottages, and shared~~  
4 ~~living residences or group quarters.~~  
5

### ~~Review Committees~~

- 6  
7  
8 ~~10. Form a special task force consisting of farmers, workers, lenders, public~~  
9 ~~housing providers, and elected officials to initiate regulations designed to~~  
10 ~~encourage and enable farmers to provide housing for farm workers.~~  
11

- 12 ~~11. Establish a broad-based citizen committee consisting of interested and~~  
13 ~~affected parties to:~~

- 14
- 15 ~~• Review existing regulations for consistency with the goals contained in~~  
16 ~~this plan and review proposed regulations for their effect on housing~~  
17 ~~affordability and availability.~~
- 18
- 19 ~~• Evaluate local legislative actions for opportunities to enhance availability~~  
20 ~~of affordable housing to all residents of the county and enforcement of~~  
21 ~~laws pertaining to tenant rights.~~  
22

### ~~Staffing~~

- 23  
24  
25 ~~12. In general budget review, allow for adequate staff to provide timely review of~~  
26 ~~land use proposals.~~  
27

### ~~Building Standards~~

- 28  
29  
30 ~~13. Encourage private groups to inventory sets of pre-approved residential~~  
31 ~~building plans that can be offered to the public free of charge.~~  
32

- 33 ~~14. Investigate and enable creative options to reduce or eliminate infrastructure~~  
34 ~~requirements such as road width, sidewalks, curbs and gutters where it is~~  
35 ~~clearly demonstrated that such action does not create a safety hazard and is~~  
36 ~~not contrary to the interests of the health and well-being of county residents.~~  
37

### ~~Lot Size/Shape~~

- 38  
39  
40 ~~15. Adopt land use regulations and development standards that allow innovative~~  
41 ~~lot designs (Z lots, zero lot lines, small lot districts) in the interest of~~  
42 ~~reducing the serviced lot portion of overall housing development costs.~~  
43

- 44 ~~16. Eliminate lot consolidation criteria when it is in the interest of serving~~  
45 ~~housing affordability.~~  
46

- 47 ~~17. Where appropriate, and through density adjustments, decrease minimum lot~~  
48 ~~sizes.~~

1 **Mixed-Use**

2  
3 ~~18. Adopt development regulations that provide for adequate buffering~~  
4 ~~requirements (trees, other vegetation, and fences) and sound insulation~~  
5 ~~between uses to minimize drawbacks of mixed use such as noise, odors, and~~  
6 ~~cluttered views.~~

7  
8 ~~19. Review and revise land use regulations and adopt "adaptive re-use" to allow~~  
9 ~~the conversion of single-family dwellings, commercial/light industrial facilities~~  
10 ~~and other non-residential structures to a variety of housing types where~~  
11 ~~water and sewage treatment can be provided.~~

12  
13 **Developer Incentives**

14  
15 ~~20. Review potential for offering density bonuses, reduced lot size, and other~~  
16 ~~incentives for including specified proportions of housing targeted for low- and~~  
17 ~~moderate-income households.~~

18  
19  
20 ~~21. Through adoption of a set of incentives, use some form of inclusionary zoning~~  
21 ~~that encourages provision of housing targeted for low- and moderate-income~~  
22 ~~households.~~

23  
24 ~~22. Make a series or menu of incentives, including but not limited to density~~  
25 ~~bonuses, transfer of development rights, and/or infrastructure concessions~~  
26 ~~available to project developers wherever special needs populations are~~  
27 ~~specifically served.~~

28  
29 ~~23. Require impact and mitigation fees, if any, to be paid at the time the~~  
30 ~~occupancy permit is issued by Whatcom County.~~

31  
32 ~~24. Provide additional bonus housing density for inclusion of affordable housing~~  
33 ~~in a Planned Unit Development.~~

34  
35 **Buyer Assistance**

36  
37 ~~25. Establish a housing development fund, accessible to individuals qualified for~~  
38 ~~affordable housing assistance who are legal residents of the county,~~  
39 ~~administered by an agency such as Bellingham-Whatcom County Housing~~  
40 ~~Authority or the Whatcom County Opportunity Council, and funded by~~  
41 ~~contributions from developers wishing to utilize affordable housing incentives~~  
42 ~~and bonuses, but not wishing to include affordable housing in their own~~  
43 ~~projects.~~

44  
45 ~~26. Support existing agencies which provide for, or provide assistance in~~  
46 ~~obtaining, low- or no-interest loans for first-time home buyers and others~~  
47 ~~needing assistance to purchase homes.~~

1 **Education**

2  
3 ~~27. Prepare an easily-understood guide or set of guides, readily available to the~~  
4 ~~public, describing in a step-by-step fashion the processes required for land~~  
5 ~~use actions.~~

6  
7 ~~28. Educate the public about permitting processes, and the availability of existing~~  
8 ~~house plans by providing easy access to information through media such as~~  
9 ~~videotapes, workshops, the Internet and others.~~

10  
11 ~~29. Educate the public about innovative housing ideas including co-housing, elder~~  
12 ~~cottages, and shared living residences or group quarters.~~

13  
14 ~~30. Coordinate with local, state, and federal housing agencies, organizations and~~  
15 ~~jurisdictions to further Whatcom County's goals and policies relating to~~  
16 ~~housing.~~

17  
18 ~~31. Work with local, state and federal agencies to coordinate programs and~~  
19 ~~secure grants or other funds available for housing programs.~~

20 **Housing Affordability, Distribution, and Targeting**

21  
22 ~~32. Allocate to each UGA and city a "fair share allocation" that specifies the~~  
23 ~~number of affordable housing units that are needed to accommodate each~~  
24 ~~economic segment of the population in each area.~~

25  
26 **Policy Priority in Favor of Permanent Community Benefit**

27  
28 ~~33. Seek perpetual affordability achievable through nonprofit-owned rental~~  
29 ~~housing and certain forms of homeownership including community land~~  
30 ~~trusts, limited equity condominiums, and deed restricted homeownership.~~

31  
32 **Inclusionary Zoning**

33  
34 ~~34. Develop inclusionary zoning incentives and requirements that integrate~~  
35 ~~affordable housing into new market-rate developments.~~

36  
37 ~~35. Develop a system for inclusionary zoning payments made in lieu of providing~~  
38 ~~inclusionary units in some developments.~~

39  
40 **Financial Incentives to Encourage Affordability**

41  
42 ~~36. Explore legislative authority to use "current use taxation policies" to benefit~~  
43 ~~affordable housing by applying the tax abatement policy now available for~~  
44 ~~farmland, timberland and other open spaces.~~

45  
46 ~~37. Explore other financial incentives such as tax credits for low-income~~  
47 ~~households who opt into a non-speculative housing market.~~

- 1 ~~38. Encourage “employer-assisted housing” as a recruitment/retention strategy~~
- 2 ~~using down payment assistance, interest rate buy-downs, second mortgages,~~
- 3 ~~etc.~~
- 4
- 5 **Funding Strategies**
- 6
- 7 ~~39. Create a “housing trust fund” to provide dedicated funding for housing~~
- 8 ~~priorities set by the jurisdictions involved.~~
- 9
- 10 ~~40. Consider using the “Housing and Conservation Trust” used in Vermont to~~
- 11 ~~fund affordable housing inside urban areas that takes pressure off farmland,~~
- 12 ~~open space and rural lands.~~
- 13
- 14 ~~41. Consider a ballot measure for a “housing levy” that funds affordable housing~~
- 15 ~~development.~~
- 16
- 17 ~~42. Consider a housing levy that adapts the Vermont model by proposing a~~
- 18 ~~combination of open space/farmland/salmon protection along with support~~
- 19 ~~for permanently affordable housing at the right location.~~
- 20
- 21 ~~43. Consider using a “real estate excise tax” or a “real estate transfer tax” a~~
- 22 ~~County-wide tax or levy to provide a revenue stream for the local housing~~
- 23 ~~trust fund for affordable housing.~~