

Kate Blystone - Comments on Urban Growth Area Review for 9/16/2009 hearing



From: Eric Hirst <EricHirst@comcast.net>
To: <council@co.whatcom.wa.us>, <PDS_Planning_Commission@co.whatcom.wa.us>
Date: 9/10/2009 8:50 AM
Subject: Comments on Urban Growth Area Review for 9/16/2009 hearing
Attachments: Hirst on UGA Review 9 10 2009.pdf

Dear Whatcom County Council and Planning Commission Members,

Attached are my comments on Executive Kremen's August 2009 recommendations on the Urban Growth area Review. My statement addresses what I believe the key goals for this review should be:

- Adopt a low population projection in response to strong public support for slower growth.
- Ensure that UGAs are no larger than needed to accommodate the number of new people the county decides is appropriate in total and for each UGA.
- Ensure that urban growth leads to more dynamic, livable cities with less reliance on automobiles. Again, this requires the county to limit the size of UGAs.
- Protect rural areas, especially farmland, from further suburbanization.

Eric

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September 10, 2009

Whatcom County Council
Whatcom County Planning Commission
Bellingham, WA 98225

Public Hearing on Urban Growth Area Review, September 16, 2009

Dear Whatcom County Council and Planning Commission Members,

The key goals of the UGA review and revision, in my view, should be to:

- Adopt a low population projection in response to strong public support for slower growth.
- Ensure that UGAs are no larger than needed to accommodate the number of new people the county decides is appropriate in total and for each UGA.
- Ensure that urban growth leads to more dynamic, livable cities with less reliance on automobiles. Again, this requires the county to limit the size of UGAs.
- Protect rural areas, especially farmland, from further suburbanization.

Because of Pete Kremen's recommendations, the county has the opportunity to better meet these important goals, strongly supported by local citizens. I thank Executive Kremen for taking the time and making the effort to study closely these issues of population growth and allocation, environmental protection, and public preferences, and to develop such a sound set of recommendations. Thanks also to David Stalheim and staff in the Department of Planning and Development Services.

I urge the county council in its deliberations on the appropriate number of people to plan for each UGA and the appropriate size and location of each UGA to consider the following:

Adopt a lower overall population projection. As Futurewise Whatcom noted,¹ there are many benefits to planning for slower growth:

- The population projection is primarily a policy decision, not a technical exercise.
- The vast majority of Whatcom County residents prefer slower growth.
- Planning for high growth commits local governments to provide unaffordable levels of government services and infrastructure.
- Slower population growth contributes to a better quality of life and preserves the diversity of lifestyles that citizens value.
- A lower projection is less risky and easier to adjust to actual growth patterns in the future.
- The county's draft EIS for this UGA project showed that the adverse environmental and social impacts were directly proportional to population growth—the more people who move to Whatcom County, the worse our problems will be and the more difficult and expensive it will be to address them.

¹ Futurewise Whatcom, *Ten Reasons for a Lower Population Projection for the Whatcom 2031 Planning Project*, February 2009.

Protect water quality. I strongly support Executive Kremen's protections for our key water bodies, including Lake Padden, Lake Whatcom, Drayton Harbor and Birch Bay. These areas should be removed from UGAs and managed to restore water quality and protect their watersheds.

Prevent sprawl in rural areas. Doing so has many environmental benefits (wildlife protection, reduced flooding, and better water quality) and social benefits (maintain the healthy diversity of livelihoods, lifestyles, and landscapes we currently enjoy in Whatcom County). The county should include no agricultural lands inside UGAs. To the extent possible, farmland that is now within a UGA should be taken out of the UGA and other lands, if necessary, should be substituted.

Create Urban Growth Area Reserves. The Reserves that Executive Kremen proposes make sense. They provide a sensible way to deal with the enormous uncertainties about future population and employment growth, where that growth will occur within the county, and county and municipal policies that affect growth. These Reserves remain rural (i.e., homes on no less than 10 acres), which assures that if needed for urban growth they will not have been spoiled by sprawl. If not needed for urban growth, these areas remain rural and largely undeveloped.

In closing, I again thank Pete Kremen and David Stalheim for their hard work on this set of UGA proposals. I urge the County Council to approve these recommendations, with minor changes, to shrink the UGAs from the current oversized situation and to better protect our scarce agricultural lands from inappropriate development.

Thank you.

Eric Hirst

cc: Pete Kremen, County Executive
David Stalheim, Director of Planning and Development Services