

Kate Blystone - Fwd: Public Comment-UGA

From: PDS
To: David Stalheim; Kate Blystone; PDS_Planning_Commission
Date: 9/18/2009 10:11 AM
Subject: Fwd: Public Comment-UGA

>>> "R. Perry Eskridge" <rperryeskridge@comcast.net> 9/17/2009 10:47 AM >>>
Colleagues,

Please accept the following comments on behalf of the Whatcom County Association of Realtors. These comments pertain to the Urban Growth Area recommendation submitted by Whatcom County Executive Pete Kremen, which is the subject of the joint Whatcom County Planning Commission/County Council public hearing this evening.

- 1) The Whatcom County Association of Realtors renews its objection to the population figures utilized in the UGA reviews. Throughout this process, we have suggested using a range of figures that have, as their outside boundaries, the high projection from the Washington Office of Financial Management and, perhaps, a low suggested by the ECO Northwest projections. We have previously stated that when planning for future population, aiming too low is not appropriate as the result is a lack of sufficient areas to accommodate the population. While we understand that Executive Kremen has arrived at a population figure that is too low. Even using the high suggested by the Growth Management Coordinating council, that could ultimately result in a shortage of almost 1,000 planned housing units alone! While that may not seem like much now, the long-term effects on planning efforts could be detrimental to the planning goals we are expressing now.
- 2) Many of the areas suggested to be placed into an Urban Growth Reserve area are also slated for a downzone. Looking at these areas individually, the impact that such downzones will be creation of nonconforming lots on an unprecedented scale! Such a result from long-term planning efforts is unacceptable and the zoning should be changed to reflect a more measured approach to the existing lots and an effort to keep as many landowners as possible from suffering the effects that the planning recommendations will have on the *existing* property owners. Frankly, the planning efforts in this regard are surprising and demonstrate a complete lack of regard for the conditions "on the ground" and the activities that have been allowed to take place in these areas historically by County Government.
- 3) Finally, the Realtors would ask that the County Planning Department and Council members continue their efforts on achieving meaningful infill opportunities within the existing municipal boundaries of cities in Whatcom County. Like many people in the area, we are concerned about the preservation of rural lands and appreciate the opportunity to work with the County in that regard. However, success in this area continues to be based upon the ability of individuals to utilize their urban lands more efficiently to accommodate greater numbers of people in the existing neighborhoods. While Bellingham and Ferndale are working toward greater use of their municipal zoning areas, the County could further lead by example through the appropriate zoning of LAMIRDs and inclusion of sufficient land within the LAMIRDs to accommodate infill opportunities within those rural centers.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. As always, if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

R. Perry Eskridge
Government Affairs Director
Whatcom County Association of Realtors
3317 Northwest Ave.
Bellingham, WA 98225
(360)671-5477