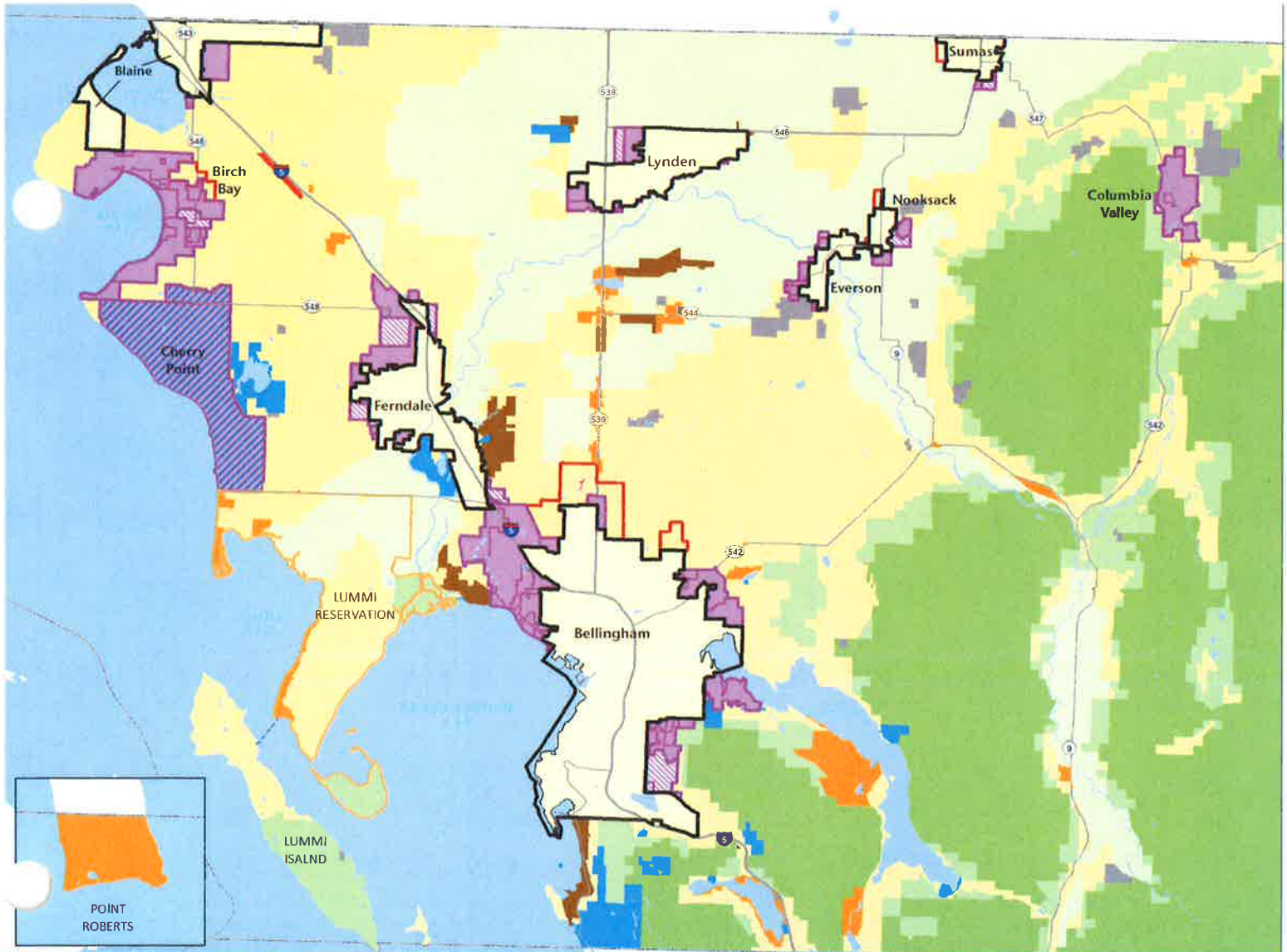


Final EIS

Whatcom County 2016 Comprehensive Plan and Development Regulations Update and Urban Growth Areas Review

November 2015





November 12, 2015

Subject: Whatcom County 2016 Comprehensive Plan and Development Regulations Update and Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) Review Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS)

Dear Reader,

Whatcom County is preparing to update its Comprehensive Plan in accordance with the Growth Management Act (GMA). The County is required to complete its review and update of the Comprehensive Plan elements, development regulations, and UGAs by June 30, 2016. As part of this review and update, the County and cities of Bellingham, Blaine, Everson, Ferndale, Lynden, Nooksack, and Sumas are collaborating on a process to allocate population and employment growth to UGAs and the area of the County outside of UGAs. As a result of the review and update process, the County is considering amendments to County Comprehensive Plan goals and policies, UGA boundaries, land use maps, and other plan elements, as well as development regulations (zoning, critical areas ordinance, etc.).

Four alternatives were studied in the Draft EIS issued in March 2015 addressing a range of population and employment growth levels and patterns including: Alternative 1 No Action, Alternative 2 Historic Shares, Alternative 3 Multijurisdictional Resolution (Resolution 2014-013), and Alternative 4 Targeted Land Use Change. The Final EIS studies a Preferred Alternative which would include County and City proposals for each UGA similar to and in the range of the Draft EIS alternatives. All alternatives would amend County plans and regulations to meet the County's eight-year GMA review and evaluation requirements, except for the No Action Alternative, which presumes a continuation of current plans and regulations.

Whatcom County included the following areas for discussion in the EIS: Earth, air quality, water resources, plants and animals, land and shoreline use, plans and policies, population, housing and employment, cultural resources, transportation, and public services and utilities. For each natural and built environment topic, a comparative evaluation of alternative courses of action is included in the EIS.

This Final EIS responds to public and agency comments received on the Draft EIS, issued on March 10, 2015, and provides corrections and clarifications to the environmental analysis contained in the Draft EIS. The Final EIS also evaluates a Preferred Alternative identified by each City and the County, which is a variation of studied Draft EIS Alternatives.

Key environmental issues and options facing decision makers are listed below:

- location of growth;
- sizing and composition of UGAs given growth expected over the 2013-2036 period;
- the amount and location of growth balanced in UGA and non-UGA areas in order to protect resource lands of long-term commercial significance and rural lands; and
- the level of capital improvements needed to support land use/growth levels.

Cover Letter
November 12, 2015
Page 2

For questions, the County's contact person is:

Matt Aamot, Senior Planner
Planning and Development Services
5280 Northwest Drive
Bellingham, Washington 98226
E-mail: pds@co.whatcom.wa.us

To view the Final EIS, agencies, affected tribes, and members of the public may consult the project website:

<http://wa-whatcomcounty.civicplus.com/1178/Environmental-Impact-Statement>.

Sincerely,



Designated SEPA Responsible Official
Mark Personius, Assistant Director,
Whatcom County Planning and Development Services

FACT SHEET

Project Title

Whatcom County 2016 Comprehensive Plan and Development Regulations Update and Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) Review

Proposed Action and Alternatives

Whatcom County is preparing to update its Comprehensive Plan in accordance with the Growth Management Act (GMA). The County is required to complete its review and update of the Comprehensive Plan elements, development regulations, and UGAs by June 30, 2016. As part of this review and update, the County and cities of Bellingham, Blaine, Everson, Ferndale, Lynden, Nooksack, and Sumas are collaborating on a process to allocate population and employment growth to UGAs and the area of the County outside of UGAs. As a result of the review and update process, the County is considering amendments to County Comprehensive Plan goals and policies, UGA boundaries, land use maps, and other plan elements, as well as development regulations (zoning, critical areas ordinances, etc.). In turn, the seven cities of Whatcom County are also anticipated to consider amendments to their own plans and regulations, and may use this Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) as a basis for their respective reviews, as allowed under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA).

Four alternatives were studied in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS):

- **Alternative 1: No Action.** Assumes that the existing Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan and associated growth projections are carried forward; this represents a lower growth option (48,630 population growth).
- **Alternative 2: Historic Shares.** Allocates growth to each UGA and the area outside the UGAs using recent historic population shares (68,111 population growth, which is the Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM)'s medium projection).
- **Alternative 3: Multi-Jurisdictional Resolution (Resolution 2014-013).** Allocates growth requested by the cities and County as approved by the County Council (74,781 population growth).
- **Alternative 4: Targeted Land Use Change.** Proposes a higher countywide population projection, apportioned similarly to the Multi-Jurisdictional Resolution (86,149 population growth).

Employment would also vary by alternative within a range of 26,372 to 41,506 new jobs. UGA infill and boundary changes are considered in all alternatives, to different degrees, based on land capacity assumptions; except that the No Action Alternative would continue the present boundaries.

This Final EIS studies a **Preferred Alternative** which would include County and City proposals for each UGA, resulting in a net change of 67,216 - 69,868 persons, which is similar to Alternative 2 Historic Shares in terms of total population though the distribution of the population would be based on local jurisdiction preferences similar to Alternative 3 Multi-Jurisdictional Resolution. The planned employment of 37,052 is also in the range of the Draft EIS Alternatives and between the employment levels of Alternative 3 (36,029) and Alternative 4 Targeted Land Use Change (41,506).

All alternatives would amend County plans and regulations to meet the County's eight-year GMA review and evaluation requirements, except for the No Action Alternative, which presumes a continuation of current plans and regulations.

Location

The proposal encompasses all of Whatcom County.

Growth allocations and patterns across the county and cities are reviewed in the EIS. The amendment of the County's plans and regulations, and their effect on unincorporated areas is also reviewed. The cities may use this EIS as a basis for their respective reviews as allowed under SEPA.

Proponent

Whatcom County

Tentative Date of Implementation

June 2016

Lead Agency

Whatcom County

Responsible Official

Designated SEPA Responsible Official
Mark Personius, Assistant Director
Planning and Development Services
5280 Northwest Drive
Bellingham, Washington 98226

Contact Person

Matt Aamot, Senior Planner
Planning and Development Services
5280 Northwest Drive
Bellingham, Washington 98226
Telephone: (360) 676-6907
E-mail: pds@co.whatcom.wa.us

Required Approvals

Recommendations by the Whatcom County Planning Commission; adoption of the Comprehensive Plan and development regulation amendments by the Whatcom County Council; review by the Washington State Department of Commerce, as required by the GMA; and consultation and transportation element certification by the Whatcom Council of Governments.

Authors and Principal Contributors to the Final EIS

Principal Authors

BERK Consulting
2025 First Avenue, Suite 800
Seattle, WA 98121
(206) 324-8760

Contributing Authors

Anchor QEA Bellingham
1605 Cornwall Avenue
Bellingham, WA 98225
(Earth, Water Resources, Plants and Animals, Cultural Resources)

Heffron Transportation
6544 NW 61st Street
Seattle, WA 98115
206-523-3939
(Transportation)

Landau Associates
601 Union Street, Suite 1606
Seattle, WA 98101

206-631-8680
(Air Quality)

Whatcom Council of Governments
314 E. Champion St.
Bellingham, WA 98225
(360) 676-6974
(Transportation Modeling)

Draft EIS Date of Issuance

March 10, 2015

Final EIS Date of Issuance

November 12, 2015

Draft of Final Action

June 2016

Prior Environmental Review Documents

Prior environmental review was conducted during the preparation and amendment of the Comprehensive Plan over the last 10 years as documented below:

- *Final Environmental Impact Statement. 10-Year Urban Growth Area Review.* October 2009. Seattle, WA. Prepared for and issued by Whatcom County. Prepared by ICF Jones & Stokes.
- *Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, Foothills Subarea Plan.* December 19, 2008. Prepared and issued by Whatcom County Planning and Development Services.

Relevant information from these documents was considered in this EIS, where appropriate.

Location of Background Data

Whatcom County Planning and Development Services
5280 Northwest Drive
Bellingham, Washington 98226

Planned Environmental Review

The County may conduct or require environmental review for non-exempt proposals, and use existing SEPA documents as appropriate. The cities may use this EIS as a basis for their respective reviews as allowed under SEPA.

Final EIS Availability

The purchase price of a copy of the Final EIS is based on reproduction costs of printed documents or compact disks (CDs). Copies may be purchased at:

Applied Digital Imaging
1803 North State Street
Bellingham, WA 98226

Hard copies of the Final EIS are available for review at:

Whatcom County Planning and Development Services
5280 Northwest Drive
Bellingham, Washington 98226

The document is also posted on the project website:

<http://wa-whatcomcounty.civicplus.com/1178/Environmental-Impact-Statement>.

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