



Memorandum

January 17, 2023

To: The Honorable Satpal Sidhu, Whatcom County Executive  
The Honorable Whatcom County Council

From: Matt Aamot, Senior Planner

Through: Steve Roberge, Assistant Director

RE: Buildable Lands Report 2022

The Washington State legislature amended the Growth Management Act (GMA) in 1997 to include a "review and evaluation program," also known as the buildable lands program (RCW 36.70A.215). At that time, the review and evaluation program applied to six counties: Clark, King, Kitsap, Pierce, Snohomish, and Thurston. The State legislature amended the GMA in 2017 to add Whatcom County to the list of counties required to undertake a review and evaluation program ([ESSSB 5254](#)).

The review and evaluation program has several main components, which are summarized below:

- Determining whether a county and its cities are achieving urban densities within urban growth areas by comparing growth and development assumptions contained in the county and city comprehensive plans with actual growth and development that has occurred;
- Determining whether there is sufficient land that is suitable for development in the future; and
- Identifying reasonable measures, if necessary, to reduce the differences between growth assumptions contained in comprehensive plans and actual development patterns ([RCW 36.70A.215](#)).

The County and the Cities, with the assistance of a consultant, developed the *Buildable Lands Report 2022* to address these state requirements. This Report, issued on July 7, 2022, contains countywide findings and jurisdiction profiles that address each individual urban growth area.

The Planning Commission held a public hearing on October 13, 2022 and recommended that the County Council adopt the *Buildable Lands Report 2022*. Main issues discussed at the Planning Commission included:

1. Housing affordability; and
2. Land supply for single family homes in Bellingham.

Staff made a presentation on Buildable Lands at County Council's Planning and Development Committee on November 9, 2022. The Council's Planning and Development Committee further discussed the *Buildable Lands Report* on December 6, 2022 and January 10, 2023. At the January meeting, the Council Committee requested staff to draft additional findings relating to housing affordability and GMA housing element requirements, which have now been incorporated into the draft ordinance.

After the Council's Planning and Development Committee completes review, we request that the County Council introduce an ordinance relating to the *Buildable Lands Report* and, two weeks after introduction, hold a public hearing prior to voting on the draft ordinance.

Thank you for your review of this matter.