

PROPOSED BY: DONOVAN & SCANLON  
INTRODUCED: \_\_\_\_\_

RESOLUTION NO. \_\_\_\_\_

**RESOLUTION REGARDING ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE FROM THE COUNTY COUNCIL TO THE EXECUTIVE AND PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES ON THE POPULATION, HOUSING AND EMPLOYMENT ALLOCATIONS**

**WHEREAS**, the Growth Management Act (GMA) requires Whatcom County and the cities to review and, if needed, update their respective comprehensive plans; and

**WHEREAS**, the GMA requires county and city comprehensive plans to be coordinated and consistent; and

**WHEREAS**, the GMA states that urban growth areas (UGAs) must be revised to accommodate the urban growth projected to occur in the succeeding 20-year planning period that extends through 2045, (RCW 36.70A.130); and

**WHEREAS**, population, housing, and employment allocations are a critical component in the comprehensive plan update and UGA review processes; and

**WHEREAS**, Whatcom County's Countywide Planning Policies encourage placing a larger share of population growth and housing allocations in Bellingham and urban areas, and less in rural areas; and

**WHEREAS**, the GMA encourages placing a larger share of population growth and housing allocations in urban areas, and less in rural areas; and

**WHEREAS**, the County and cities' climate action and sustainability goals include minimizing vehicle trips from rural areas to urban areas; and

**WHEREAS**, Transit Oriented Development is key to these climate action and sustainability goals including minimizing vehicle trips from rural areas to urban areas; and

**WHEREAS**, Transit Oriented Development is more practical when housing and employment growth is concentrated in urban areas; and

**WHEREAS**, ~~through a separate resolution, titled~~ On March 11, 2025, the County Council approved Resolution 2025-011, "Non-Binding Multi-Jurisdictional Resolution Regarding Population, Housing and Employment Allocations," ~~the County Council will agreeing to approve~~ preliminary allocations for initial review of urban growth areas by the County and cities; and

**WHEREAS**, while final decisions on population, housing, and employment allocations will not be made until the next comprehensive plan is adopted, it is important for the County and cities to agree upon preliminary allocations in order to

**Commented [K01]:**

TRACKED CHANGES LEGEND:

County Council staff changes – RED  
Bellingham staff changes – BLUE  
Ferndale staff changes – PURPLE  
Nooksack staff changes – ORANGE  
Everson staff changes – DARK RED  
Sumas City Council changes – TURQUOISE

**Commented [CB2]:** CWPPs do not call out Bellingham specifically, but do encourage growth in UGAs generally over rural areas.

**Commented [MC3]:** I assume this is the current cycle

coordinate transportation modeling, capital facility planning, environmental review, and UGA recommendations; and

**WHEREAS**, the final population and employment allocations may affect how accurately the cities and County plan for investing substantial amounts of capital into infrastructure needed for achieving housing and employment growth; and

**WHEREAS**, the preliminary population, housing, and employment growth allocations shown in Exhibit A ~~to~~ the "Non-Binding Multi-Jurisdictional Resolution" plan for population growth ~~above~~ 19% greater ~~than~~ the State Office of Financial Management's (OFM's) most likely projection for growth through 2045; and

**WHEREAS**, higher city and UGA population projections will allow for increased housing supply and densities to help address ~~our~~the County's affordable housing needs, ~~they also and~~ increase capacity and feasibility for Transit Oriented Development, ~~but may direct and compel responsible and~~ capital facility planning and ~~potential~~ capital facilities investments to areas ~~projecting longer term development windowsthat may not be developed within the 20 year planning period;~~ and

**WHEREAS**, population and employment proposals in Exhibit A to the "Non-Binding Multi-Jurisdictional Resolution" include levels above the medium growth projections in some UGAs not adjacent to major projected employment areas, such as Columbia Valley; ~~and~~

**WHEREAS**, providing additional employment capacity in such UGAs as Columbia Valley may also reduce vehicle trips from such areas to other major employment centers; and

**WHEREAS**, the County's current land use policies may ~~lead to be re-~~evaluated to limit piecemeal development in unincorporated areas that cities may seek to annex in the future, ~~to guard against making future annexations difficult and provide protections against rural sprawl into non-Urban Growth Areas/Reservesmaking future annexations more difficult and housing even more expensive;~~

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the Whatcom County Council acknowledges that a range of population, housing, and employment allocations are being studied in the environmental impact statement and UGA review process and the final UGA growth allocations may be different than ~~what is~~ set forth in Exhibit A to the "Non-Binding Multi-Jurisdictional Resolution"; ~~and~~

**BE IT FINALLY FURTHER RESOLVED** the Whatcom County Council requests that as part of the development of the 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update, the Executive and Whatcom County Planning and Development Services:

- 1) Coordinate with the cities and County Council to recommend tools for improving development potential ~~upon annexation~~ in municipal unincorporated UGAs (e.g., annexation incentives) where cities do not extend public sewer and water prior to annexation. Furthermore, consider if policies such as the following might address those concerns:
  - a. Modifying County zoning in existing and city-proposed ~~u~~Urban ~~G~~growth ~~a~~Areas ~~and Reserves~~ to allow a maximum of one dwelling/20 acres.

**Commented [CB4]:** Three comments:

First - The WA Dept of Commerce HAPT housing allocations already include an additional housing "cushion" to account for housing for people currently experiencing homelessness, for more affordable housing for cost-burdened renters, and for additional housing to reach a healthy community-wide vacancy rate.

Second - It is important to acknowledge that increased ridership will not do much for transit feasibility (fares are less than 3% of WTA revenue). Sales tax is currently the primary funding mechanism for transit.

Third - While cities might do preliminary CF planning for areas that won't see much development during planning period, it is unlikely significant investments would be made to areas that do not already have pressure for further development.

**Commented [HH5]:** As it was previously worded, housing in non-UGAs IS affordable, so the text was contradictory

~~b. Modifying County zoning in existing and city proposed Urban Growth Area Reserves to allow a maximum of one dwelling/20 acres.~~

~~b.~~ Encourage the cities to develop or review future land use designations that would take effect in the UGAs upon annexation.

~~c.~~ Encourage alternative funding mechanisms such as impact fees and other mechanisms to pay for infrastructure needs in the UGAs to enable cities and other urban service providers more feasible means to extend these services into municipal unincorporated UGAs.

- 2) Present options and an analysis of the pros and cons of reducing or mitigating potential population growth impacts to the County's rural and resource lands.
- 3) Encourage increasing transit from outlying small cities and rural areas into major employment areas to reduce ~~VMT's~~ vehicle miles traveled.
- 4) Study street standards in municipal UGA and UGA reserves to align bicycle, pedestrian, and mobility infrastructure to connect with similar adjacent municipal infrastructure.
- 5) Provide County Council information on how employment projections in Exhibit A to the "Non-Binding Multi-Jurisdictional Resolution" for rural and rural resource areas, and for UGAs not associated with incorporated cities, align with planned commercial and industrial land capacity and zoning in those areas.
- 6) Present options to County Council to discourage and/or mitigate potential risks from growth in vulnerable floodplains and coastal areas projected to experience sea level rise and to encourage growth in safer locations low flood or no flood zones.
- 7) Establish and publish goals and metrics to expedite and reduce the cost of permitting.
- 8) Develop a work program to conduct a full code simplification process.
- 9) Establish a policy to ensure that when permit applicants receive responses from Planning and Development Services all county requests must be justified by citing ~~a~~ a specific and publicly accessible county code or state or federal law or regulation.
- 10) Update the County Council on discussion between the County, ~~the~~ City of Bellingham, City of Ferndale, and other cities that work toward addressing these issues.

**Commented [HH6]:** In OR, County Zoning is carried with an annexation for a period of one-year, post annexation and future zoning must be included in annexation application, slows development, unless req. is waived.

**Commented [CB7]:** Extension of utilities and other urban services would only occur after annexation. A regional bank for impact fees or other land value capture mechanisms to be used by cities for development of CF, urban services, and affordable housing after annexation could work and would serve to minimize development in rural areas and incentivize development in UGAs. These impact fees would not necessarily all go directly into city coffers but could support County Health and Human Services programs to provide necessary services to high-density affordable housing that develops inside UGAs that rural areas are not able to support.

**Commented [HH8]:** Some municipalities have developed amortized development fee structures over 5-20 years. The municipality (or County) collects the interest. The developer can then potentially pass the cost of the development to the home buyer on possession. This lending instrument helps the future home-owner as well as the builder.

**Commented [CB9]:** Increased transit service from small cities into major employment areas might be feasible, but increased services directly to rural areas is not likely practical given limited funding mechanisms and challenges related to efficiently serving low-density development. Park-and-rides and similar facilities in smaller cities could help limit VMTs in rural areas by providing opportunities for utilization of available or enhanced transit service.

**Commented [COS10]:** The City's UGA growth proposal is consistent with the goal of increasing the establishment of local industrial areas to help create jobs in proximity to rural population centers like Sumas. This will help increase the local economy while also helping reduce vehicle miles travelled.

**Commented [COS11]:** The City fully supports efforts to mitigate the potential risks posed by flooding in our community. We recently participated in a multi-agency workshop convened by Whatcom County River and Flood that focused directly on regional actions that could help reduce flood risks in Sumas. In addition, the City's UGA growth proposal is intended to directly address risks posed by flooding by: 1) Prohibiting development in high-hazard areas, 2) Requiring future development in the floodplain to be elevated at least two feet above the FEMA 100-year base flood elevation; and 3) Expanding the City's UGA to the west to be able to direct future growth to upland areas outside the floodplain, while ensuring that use of UGA expansion areas within the floodplain are limited to open space/agriculture and wellhead protection.

**Commented [CB12]:** Simplifying and expediting permitting makes sense. However, reducing the cost of permitting is in contrast to the goal of limiting development in rural areas. Without impact fees the cost of permitting is already not representative of the true cost of development in rural areas.

APPROVED this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 2025.

ATTEST

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL  
WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON

\_\_\_\_\_  
Cathy Halka, Clerk of the Council

\_\_\_\_\_  
Kaylee Galloway, Council Chair

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Civil Deputy Prosecutor

**Commented [HH13]:**

ON RESOLVED STATEMENTS 7-10:

Rollin/Nooksack's comment is that the City doesn't have a 'dog in the fight.' Nooksack recently had a builder's group speak to City Council lamenting the challenge of doing business in Bellingham and with the County (time frames, process and costs). The comments below are considering more broadly the current challenges facing the industry in WC.

Since these goals (7-10) are useful but incomplete, could it be more effective long term to create a committee that begins to address this issue in greater depth, and which also collaborates with the industry to put process and procedures in place, does broader research into best practices etc. This may be more necessary and effective with the prospect of recession on the horizon i.e. to recession proof the industry.

Proposed Language:

7-10) Empanel a joint committee (define membership) to review Development and Permitting practices to align county, municipal and industry practices – to support, manage and protect growth, and to foster an effective, coordinated and responsible housing supply and development infrastructure within Whatcom County.