

Whatcom County TDR/PDR Multi-Stakeholder Work Group

Final Report

October 3, 2018

- Portion of TDR Sale Money – King County provides Sammamish with a percentage of the revenue from TDR sales by the TDR bank.
- Tax Revenue Sharing – King County shares property tax money with Seattle through the Landscape Conservation and Local Infrastructure Program (LCLIP), which is applicable to King, Pierce, and Snohomish Counties.

Identifying a benefit to city residents (or providing amenity funds) would be an important component of partnering with cities to develop a density credit program. In a density credit program, revenue generated from purchases of development incentives could be shared by the County and city, providing a simple method for cities to also benefit from the program.

If the cities were to participate in the density credit program, they would have to formulate incentives to make it attractive for developers to utilize the program. Cities have indicated that residential development is generally occurring at or below current zoned densities, so other incentives may be needed to entice developers to use a density credit program. City zoning code changes would be needed to implement such a program.

Opportunity # 4 - Density Credit Program: Density Bonus Areas in UGAs

As previously discussed, Whatcom County has designated TDR receiving areas in the Bellingham UGA and the Birch Bay UGA. The Bellingham UGA essentially does not function as a TDR receiving area because the City generally does not extend public water and sewer to the UGA anymore. Therefore, urban development does not occur until annexation. The Birch Bay UGA has one TDR receiving area, but no development rights have been transferred to this area yet.

The TDR/PDR Work Group recommends focusing on a density credit program, rather than on a traditional TDR program. This simplified approach would provide additional developer incentives for areas in the UGA when density credits are purchased. In November 2017, the County Council adopted a density credit program for the Resort Commercial zone in the Birch Bay UGA and should consider expanding this program to other areas in the UGA. Specifically, the lower density Urban Residential four dwellings/acre (and possibly Urban Residential Medium Density six dwellings/acre) zones in the Birch Bay UGA should be considered for increased density through the proposed density credit program.

The Columbia Valley UGA, in the eastern part of the County, could also be designated as a receiving area. In fact, the Foothills Subarea Plan contains an implementation task to:

Revise the Official Whatcom County Zoning Ordinance to designate Rural and Rural Forestry areas in the Foothills Subarea as transfer of development rights (TDR) sending areas and the Columbia Valley UGA or other urban growth areas as TDR receiving areas in order to preserve open space in rural and forestry areas (p. 15-7).

However, increasing densities in the Columbia Valley UGA should be carefully considered in light of the long drive to major employment centers, medical facilities, social services, and shopping areas.

Opportunity # 5 – Density Credit Program: Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU)

King County allows TDRs from sending areas to rural receiving areas to increase the size of accessory dwelling units from 1,000 to 1,500 square feet (King County Code 21A.08.030).

The King County TDR Program Manager indicated that they have had some TDR transfers to rural areas, but that the majority of transfers have been into urban areas such as Seattle.

The Whatcom County Zoning Code currently allows accessory dwelling units, subject to a variety of conditions, in the following zones:

- Urban Residential (WCC 20.20.132);
- Urban Residential Medium Density (WCC 20.22.132);
- Urban Residential Mixed (WCC 20.24.133);
- Residential Rural (WCC 20.32.132);
- Rural Residential – Island, which is applicable to Lummi Island (WCC 20.34.132);
- Rural (WCC 20.36.132);
- Point Roberts Transitional District (WCC 20.37.132);
- Small Town Commercial (WCC 20.61.153); and
- Resort Commercial (WCC 20.64.132).

ADU Incentive 1 - Accessory dwelling units are currently limited to 1,248 square feet in these zoning districts. The TDR/PDR Work Group recommends increasing the size limit by 500 square feet to a maximum of 1,748 square feet if density credits are purchased. It is recommended that the price should be \$8/square foot up to the 500 square foot maximum. The Work Group recommends that this rural incentive should be available anywhere that accessory dwelling units are allowed in the County.

ADU Incentive 2 - Additionally, the TDR/PDR Work Group recommends allowing an investor to pay to retire one full development right in a rural or agricultural area in exchange for eliminating the following requirement, which is normally imposed on accessory dwelling units:

The owner(s) of the single-family lot upon which the accessory apartment or detached accessory dwelling unit is located shall occupy as their primary domicile at least one of the dwelling units on that lot.

This would allow an investor (who retires one full development right) to rent out both the main house and the accessory dwelling unit on the property, as the owner would not have to live on the site.

ADU Incentive 2 can be utilized, anywhere accessory dwelling units are allowed, in the areas shown below:

Rural Areas - In rural areas (outside UGAs) the parcel would have to be:

- a. Outside of Rural Study Areas (areas zoned R5A and R10A that are valuable for agriculture);
- b. Covered by less than 50% Agriculture Protection Overlay Soils;
- c. Outside the Lake Whatcom, Lake Padden, and Lake Samish watersheds;
- d. Outside the 100 year floodplain;
- e. Outside shoreline jurisdiction;
- f. Outside an alluvial fan;
- g. Outside of and more than 1,000' from a Mineral Resource Lands designation;
- h. More than 1 mile from the runway of the Bellingham International Airport;
- i. Outside UGA Reserves;
- j. More than 1 mile from the boundary of a city;
- k. More than 1 mile from the boundary of a UGA;
- l. Within a Group A or Group B Public Water System Service Area, excluding:
 - o Group A Systems currently exceeding Water Right Limits;
 - o Group A Systems projected to exceed water right limits at full build-out; and
 - o Group A Systems with no data on system water rights or use.

UGA - In UGAs, the parcel would have to be:

- a. Outside the Lake Whatcom, Lake Padden, and Lake Samish watersheds;
- b. Outside the 100 year floodplain;
- c. Outside shoreline jurisdiction;

- d. Outside an alluvial fan;
- e. Outside of and more than 1,000' from a Mineral Resource Lands designation;
- f. More than 1 mile from the runway of the Bellingham International Airport;
- g. Within a Group A or Group B Public Water System Service Area, excluding:
 - o Group A Systems currently exceeding Water Right Limits;
 - o Group A Systems projected to exceed water right limits at full build-out; and
 - o Group A Systems with no data on system water rights or use.

The Work Group recommends that more than one incentive may be used per parcel.

Opportunity # 6 - Density Credit Program: Rural Areas

King County allows TDRs from sending areas to rural receiving areas to increase the density in the "RA-2.5" zone from 0.2 dwellings/acre to 0.4 dwellings/acre (King County Code 21A.12.030). This is equivalent to going from one dwelling/five acres to one dwelling/2.5 acres.

Rural Incentive 1 - The TDR/PDR Work Group recommends allowing a density of one dwelling/2.5 acres in the Rural one dwelling/five acre (R5A) zone if the proposed density credit program is used. This proposal targets density bonus areas, which could be developed at a density of one dwelling/2.5 acres, that have access to an existing public water system. In return for the extra density, cash would be contributed to the County's PDR program through the purchase of density credits. One development right would have to be retired in a rural or agriculture area for every new lot allowed so that there would be no net increase in development potential. Additionally, this concept should be considered with a degree of caution, as it may come as a surprise to rural land owners who purchased property in the R5A zone expecting surrounding land uses to develop at a maximum density of one dwelling/five acres. Critical area regulations could also make development at a density of one dwelling/2.5 acres more challenging in some areas. To utilize Rural Incentive 1, the parcel would have to be in the R5A zone and meet the same criteria as ADU Incentive 2 for Rural areas (be outside of Rural Study Areas, covered by less than 50% Agriculture Protection Overlay Soils, etc.).

Opportunity # 7 - Simplifying the TDR Program

The existing TDR program is cumbersome and not used very often. Additionally, the density credit model provides an attractive alternative to a traditional TDR program. Therefore, the existing TDR program should be refined, but the County should not put major effort into reforming the program.

Whatcom County has direct control over land use regulation, including densities, in unincorporated areas such as the Birch Bay UGA and rural lands. The County should consider expanding the density credit program in the Birch Bay UGA and, in limited circumstances, utilizing the density credit program in rural areas (See *Section 6 Opportunities/Alternatives to a Workable TDR Program*).

TDR Program: Sending and Receiving Areas

As mentioned, the Work Group recommends focusing on the density credit model, rather than traditional TDR sending and receiving areas. However, using the traditional TDR program, an opportunity may exist to allow the owners of separate non-contiguous parcels to transfer density from one parcel to the other. This would encourage protection of higher quality agricultural soils and critical areas without an overall increase in the number of dwellings allowed in the rural area.

For example, if a land owner has two separate 20 acre parcels both zoned R5A, the owners would typically be allowed to divide the land and build four homes on each parcel under standard zoning rules. Under this approach, the density could be transferred from one of the parcels (e.g. that has development constraints or high quality agricultural soils) to the other parcel (which does not have as many constraints). The end result would be zero development capacity on one of the 20 acre parcels and eight dwellings on the other 20 acre parcel.

This concept could be utilized to transfer density from one part of the rural area to another part of the rural area. The receiving parcel would be developed as a cluster subdivision.

This concept should not be allowed to increase density in any of the following:

- Lake Whatcom Watershed;
- UGAs and UGA Reserves;
- Lummi Island;
- Agriculture zone;
- Rural Forestry zone;
- Commercial Forestry zone;
- Mineral Resource Lands Overlay.

The Work Group is not formally recommending that this concept be implemented, but has included it in the report to allow the concept to receive further consideration prior to a formal proposal. Any such proposal in rural areas would have to be carefully reviewed under the Growth Management Act and Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan to ensure that rural character is preserved in these areas.