

**WHATCOM COUNTY
PLANNING COMMISSION**

Countywide Planning Policies

FINDINGS OF FACT AND REASONS FOR ACTION

Background Information

1. The proposal is to adopt Countywide Planning Policies (incorporated into Appendix C of the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan) relating to:
 - a. Review and Evaluation Program (also known as “Buildable Lands”).
 - b. Dispute Resolution Procedures.
2. Notice of the subject amendments was submitted to the Washington State Department of Commerce on April 20, 2020.
3. WAC 197-11-800 categorically exempts procedural actions from State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) review. The SEPA Official determined that the subject proposal is exempt as a procedural action on April 21, 2020.
4. The subject Countywide Planning Policies were posted on the County website on April 20, 2020.
5. Notice of the Planning Commission hearing was published in the Bellingham Herald on August 28, 2020.
6. Notice of the Planning Commission hearing was posted on the County website as of August 28, 2020.
7. Notice of the Planning Commission hearing was sent to citizens, media, cities, and other groups on the County’s e-mail list.
8. The Planning Commission held a public hearing on the subject amendments on September 10, 2020.

9. The Growth Management Act (GMA), originally approved by the State Legislature in 1990-91, required the County to adopt countywide planning policies in cooperation with the Cities (RCW 36.70A.040 and RCW 36.70A.210).
10. The GMA states countywide planning policies are used “. . . solely for establishing a countywide framework from which county and city comprehensive plans are developed and adopted pursuant to this chapter. This framework shall ensure that city and county comprehensive plans are consistent . . .” (RCW 36.70A.210(1)).
11. The County Council adopted the original countywide planning policies in April 1993 (Resolution 93-024).
12. The County Council amended the countywide planning policies in March 1997 (Resolution 97-011).
13. The County Council amended the countywide planning policies in January 2005 (Ordinance 2005-022).
14. The Washington State Legislature approved Engrossed Second Substitute Senate Bill 5254 relating to the Growth Management Act’s “Review and Evaluation” program requirements in 2017. This legislation imposes new requirements that Whatcom County must address, in close coordination with the cities, over the next several years.
15. The GMA now requires Whatcom County to “. . . adopt, in consultation with its cities, countywide planning policies to establish a review and evaluation program. . . (RCW 36.70A.215(1)).
16. The GMA also requires methods for resolving disputes among jurisdictions relating to these countywide planning policies (RCW 36.70A.215(2)(c)).
17. The City/County Planner Group formulated the subject countywide planning policies to address the GMA-mandated Review and Evaluation Program requirements.
18. The City/County Planner Group recommended that the Dispute Resolution Procedures should apply to any countywide planning issue rather than only matters relating to the Review and Evaluation Program. Therefore, the Dispute Resolution Procedures are separate and distinct from the Review and Evaluation Program policies.
19. The County Executive initiated these Countywide Planning Policies for review pursuant to an interlocal agreement between the County and Cities (Whatcom County Contract No. 202007014).

20. GMA Planning Goal 11, relating to citizen participation and coordination, is to "Encourage the involvement of citizens in the planning process and ensure coordination between communities and jurisdictions to reconcile conflicts" (RCW 36.70A.020(11)).
21. The subject Countywide Planning Policies include the concepts of coordination and cooperative relationships between the County and Cities consistent with the GMA.

CONCLUSION

The subject Countywide Planning Policies are consistent with the GMA and are in the public interest.

RECOMMENDATION

Based upon the above findings and conclusions, the Planning Commission recommends:

1. Approval of Exhibit A, Countywide Planning Policy amendments.

WHATCOM COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION



Kelvin Barton, Chair

09/10/2020

Date



Ashley Ubil, Secretary

09/10/2020

Date

Commissioners voted to recommend approval of the Findings of Fact & Reasons for Action and Exhibit A on September 10, 2020 (vote was 8-0 with 1 member absent). Members present at the meeting when the vote was taken: Robert Bartel, Kelvin Barton, Atul Deshmane, Jim Hansen, Kimberly Lund, Jon Maberry, Natalie McClendon, and Dominic Mocerri.