



Memorandum

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

FROM: Joshua Fleischmann, Planner

THROUGH: Mark Personius, Director

DATE: June 15, 2021

SUBJECT: PLN2017-00004 - Countywide Review of Designated Mineral Resource Lands

The purpose of this memo is to provide background information on the Whatcom County-led, countywide review of potential resource areas for inclusion in the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan as Designated Mineral Resource Lands (MRLs), and to request direction for a County Council preferred approach.

BACKGROUND

This review of potential resource areas for designation was first recommended by the Planning Commission during their review of surface mining rules under PLN2013-00008. The County Council subsequently voiced support for this review through the 2016 Comprehensive Plan update:

- Policy 8R-1: Through a county-led countywide assessment, seek to identify and designate potential commercially significant mineral resource lands, to meet future demand, compatible with water resources, agricultural lands, forest lands and other GMA goals.

Support for this process was further displayed through the docketing process in 2017 (PLN2017-00004).

APPROACH

In proceeding with this work item, Planning and Development Services (PDS) staff worked with the Whatcom County Surface Mining Advisory Committee (SMAC) to identify which potential resource areas should be considered for designation as MRLs. The attached white paper provides background on the SMAC recommendation, as well as identifying issues and providing alternative approaches for your consideration.

At the May 27, 2021 Planning Commission work session, PDS staff provided a presentation on the SMAC recommendation, including alternative mapping and regulatory approaches discussed in the white paper. The goal, at the conclusion of the work session, was a policy level recommended approach from the Planning Commission to the County Council for your consideration in requesting PDS to continue processing the docketed proposal. As the Commissioners discussed the alternatives, they concluded their preferred approach was Alternative #2 - Localized Expansion, as provided in the MRL White Paper background document. The Commission specifically supported limiting potential MRL expansion to areas

within 1/2 mile of existing MRL designations, while allowing for landowners to opt out of the MRL designation process.

At the June 10, 2021 Planning Commission work session, the following motion was approved:

After holding 2 work sessions and accepting public comment as part of the work sessions on the countywide review of Designated Mineral Resource Lands, the Planning Commission recommends the County Council request Planning and Development Services to continue processing PLN2017-00004, limiting the scope of review to the Surface Mining Advisory Committee recommendation within 1/2 mile of existing Designated MRLs. Further, the Planning Commission recommends considering allowing for landowners to opt out of MRL Designation process proposed through PLN2017-00004.

NEXT STEPS

Upon consideration of the SMAC recommendation, Planning Commission recommendation, and other potential alternatives, PDS requests direction from the County Council on a preferred approach. With this direction, PDS will engage in a more targeted analysis of parcels potentially suitable for MRL expansion that can meet the MRL designation criteria in the Comprehensive Plan. Staff would then conduct outreach to the public and incorporate public feedback into potential options, before returning to the Planning Commission for public hearings, work sessions and ultimately a recommendation to the County Council for final adoption.

I look forward to discussing this topic with you and answering any questions you may have.