



Memorandum

May 22, 2024

TO: The Honorable Whatcom County Council

FROM: Matt Aamot, Senior Planner

THROUGH: Steve Roberge, Assistant Director

RE: 2025 Comp Plan Update - Population/Employment Report

The Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA) requires Whatcom County to review and revise its comprehensive plan and development regulations by December 31, 2025 (RCW 36.70A.130). Additionally, the GMA requires review of urban growth areas (UGAs) under RCW 36.70A.130(3). The UGAs must be able to accommodate housing and employment growth projected for the planning period (through the year 2045). Therefore, Whatcom County has initiated a multi-year project to update its Comprehensive Plan and development regulations by the state deadline.

At the June 4th County Council Planning and Development Committee meeting, Leland Consulting Group will make a presentation relating to the initial population and employment report. This is the technical/background report mentioned later in this memo which is an important part of developing population, housing, and employment growth projects (2nd bullet below). The population and employment report will provide the cities, Planning Commission, and County Council with foundational information for later policy discussions relating to growth projections and allocations for the County and cities.

Comprehensive Plan Update Process

The update process for the Comprehensive Plan and development regulations in Whatcom County will include the following general steps:

- Creating and implementing a public participation plan;
- Developing population, housing and employment growth projections;
- Conducting an analysis under the State Environmental Policy Act, including the development of an environmental impact statement assessing various land use alternatives;
- Addressing recent GMA amendments, including changes relating to housing (HB 1220) and climate change planning (HB 1181);

- Engaging with advisory committees;
- Planning Commission work sessions, hearings, and recommendations; and
- Whatcom County Council meetings, hearings, and ordinance adoption.

Initial Population and Employment Report

As part of the Comprehensive Plan update and UGA review, the County and cities are undertaking a process to allocate population, housing, and employment growth to UGAs and the areas of the County outside of UGAs. The UGAs must have the capacity to accommodate the 20-year housing and employment projections.

There are several steps in the process of allocating growth, including:

- **Technical / Background Reports** - The County and cities hired a consulting firm to develop initial countywide population, housing, and employment growth projections. The *Population and Employment: Growth Projections and Preliminary Allocations Technical Report* (May 22, 2024) includes preliminary growth allocations to UGAs and the area outside UGAs. This report represents a starting point for public input and discussions by planning commissions and elected officials. Leland Consulting Group will provide an overview of this Technical Report at the June 4 County Council Planning and Development Committee meeting.
- **Initial Policy Based Recommendations** - The County and the cities will issue recommendations to adjust the technical allocations based upon County goals, city goals, public input, infrastructure capacity, land availability, etc. This step will include Whatcom County Planning Commission review and recommendations at a later date (tentatively scheduled for summer 2024).
- **Multi-Jurisdictional Resolution** - The Whatcom County Council will consider a nonbinding multi-jurisdictional resolution relating to population, housing needs, and employment growth allocations. This resolution will provide preliminary growth allocations for conducting environmental review, further analyzing land capacity, developing draft land use planning proposals, traffic modeling, and formulating draft capital facility plans.
- **Formal Planning Commission Recommendations** - The Whatcom County Planning Commission will hold public hearings on various components of the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan, including the population, housing needs, and employment growth projections. The Commission will issue formal recommendations to the County Council for modifications to the Comprehensive Plan.
- **County Council Adoption of Growth Allocations** - Final population, housing and employment growth projections will be adopted in the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan update, which must be completed by December 2025.

Conclusion

At the June 4 County Council Planning and Development Committee meeting, Leland Consulting Group will make a presentation relating to the initial population and employment report. This population and employment report will provide the Planning Commission and County Council with foundational information for later policy discussions relating to growth projections for the County.