

Whatcom County Council Planning and Development Committee

**COUNTY COURTHOUSE
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Bellingham, WA 98225-4038
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Committee Minutes - Final

**Tuesday, June 4, 2024
1 PM
Hybrid Meeting**

**HYBRID MEETING - ADJOURNS BY 2:15 PM (PARTICIPATE IN-PERSON, SEE
REMOTE JOIN INSTRUCTIONS AT www.whatcomcounty.us/joinvirtualcouncil, OR
CALL 360.778.5010)**

COUNCILMEMBERS

Todd Donovan
Ben Elenbaas
Jon Scanlon

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Dana Brown-Davis, C.M.C.

Call To Order

Committee member Jon Scanlon called the meeting to order at 1 p.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

Present: 3 - Todd Donovan, Ben Elenbaas, and Jon Scanlon

Also Present: Barry Buchanan, Tyler Byrd, Kaylee Galloway, and Mark Stremmer

Announcements

Special Presentation

1. [AB2024-356](#) Presentation on the Population and Employment: Growth Projections and Preliminary Allocations Technical Report, associated with the 2025 Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan Update

Matt Aamot, Planning and Development Services Department, introduced the discussion and presentation. He stated the County and City hired a consulting firm to develop a population and employment Technical Report which includes preliminary growth allocations to Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) and the areas outside UGAs. It represents a starting point for discussion by the public, staff, Planning Commission and elected officials.

Ted Kamp, Leland Consulting Group, read from a presentation (on file)

Donovan stated it does not seem like a sound method to take the growth figures they have had for the last 20 years (figures 6 and 7 in the report) and say they are going to keep doing that without adjusting.

Kamp stated Donovan is pointing out the key difference between this preliminary technical allocation and what should be the policy allocation that will ultimately be decided on.

Donovan stated last time they essentially went down the same track, but there is no way they are putting 16,000 people into areas outside the UGA. They took the projections last time and did the allocations based on those projections. But he asked when it is that the policy makers should say stop this train because it is not a sound method and is replicating the past.

Aamot answered when the opportunity will be for elected officials to say that this is data that is not being applied in a useful way, and stated they will come to the Council (and the city planners will go to the city councils)

around late summer or early fall.

Donovan stated that is not a lot of time for them to give guidance and that is his frustration. His other frustration (and, he thinks, that of other elected officials) is that they have goals or values about how these numbers should be allocated, but if they wait until the fall to go through this staff-driven process, and have a compressed time to get the Comprehensive Plan done, they will just replicate what they have done the last few Comprehensive Plans. He would like to know when elected officials get to tell staff, before the fall, that this is not the direction they want to go.

Aamot stated a meeting between the Council and other elected officials from the cities would be a good forum to discuss that type of issue. He answered whether the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) would present alternatives for allocations and stated it would not. He answered how the Council should inform the process.

Kamp and Aamot answered whether the Washington Office of Financial Management (OFM) does not publish the probabilities for the high, middle, and low range projections, and Kamp stated not to his knowledge. Kamp continued his presentation on employment allocations.

Aamot and Kamp answered whether they have any analysis on how past decisions on growth projections and allocations have impacted the county, whether projections and the path they choose are a self-fulfilling prophecy, and whether the technical allocation is acknowledging that they are not going to be putting jobs at Cherry Point relative to the size of the land mass there. Aamot stated they will be doing a land capacity analysis to see how many jobs could be accommodated out there and that will go into the policy discussions. Kamp stated the more fine-grained they get at this point, the more likely they are to be wrong. It makes sense that as they move from technical to policy, that is the chance to try to direct some of this growth in the most sensible way.

Donovan stated the industrial allocations just do not mesh with the reality of what he sees on a map.

Elenbaas stated if you look at the reality of what is on the ground at Cherry Point it may not be so big because of all of the overlays that they regulate for. Just the nature of heavy industry requires a lot of land, and more so than something that would be done inside of a city or on an acre of land inside the Port.

Aamot answered what other data points they will see as they start to look at these decisions, in addition to the population projections. He stated some important ones will be the land capacity analysis and capital facilities planning. He stated they also have updated draft flood and sea level rise maps and those things will also be taken into consideration. Community vision will play a part, and another piece of information will be resource lands. The draft EIS will also look at an analysis of a variety of environmental impacts.

Councilmembers and staff discussed the process for translating the technical allocations into policy goals and, if they want to move numbers around, how that works, what happens when the elected officials give staff their priorities and their sense of what things look like on the ground in July, taking that input and creating a multijurisdictional resolution to then present to the County Council, how they find the tools to actually make the allocations go where they want them to, and whether that would look like the Council making policy goals or whether they could just make statements about specific zoning that they want.

Donovan stated he will work to schedule a meeting with other elected officials.

Galloway stated she is still trying to wrap her head around whether projections that were chosen in previous Comprehensive Plan iterations were accurate and how they compared to reality, and she does not see how the current migration projections (going in a downward trend) are considering things like remote work and changing climates that might result in people wanting to move to more temperate areas.

Aamot spoke about past Comprehensive Plan projections and stated they were not too far off, and Kamp stated they looked at the work-from-home and climate-related migration trends.

Scanlon stated this gets back to State legislation and some of Council's direction that they do want this process to account for climate change.

This agenda item was PRESENTED.

Committee Discussion and Recommendation to Council

1. [AB2024-343](#) Discussion and motion to approve the Public Participation Plan for 2025 Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan and Development Regulations Update

Matt Aamot, Planning and Development Services Department, introduced the presentation and spoke about the modified version of the Draft Public Participation Plan and what changes were made from the original.

Rachelle Bradley, SCJ Alliance, read from a presentation (on file).

Aamot answered whether the Public Participation Plan is part of State law and that the process that sets up how they do the Comprehensive Plan review requires that they have it, and he stated that is true.

Donovan moved to approve the Public Participation Plan for the Comprehensive Plan update.

Scanlon asked whether there was a way to leverage the daily interactions that many County employees have with people in the community, such as a QR code with the public survey. Aamot stated that is up to the Executive, and he spoke about similar things the City of Bellingham is doing.

Elenbaas stated, with the survey, he is questioning whether people know exactly what they are doing when they do it and how the consultants know they are not directing an outcome based on how they are asking questions in each location.

Bradley spoke about what they do for in-person engagement and in meetings with specific communities and answered how they correct the bias of the feedback they receive since only certain types of people might go to large community events. She answered whether they are sharing the data with the cities so it helps to inform their decisions and processes. Bradley and Aamot stated they can do that.

Satpal Sidhu, County Executive, stated it would be advisable if they make presentations to all the city councils and use their outreach (such as newsletters) to reach out to their citizens.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Scanlon, Donovan, and Elenbaas

Nay: 0

This agenda item was RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL OF REQUEST.

Motion approved to approve the Public Participation Plan for the Comprehensive Plan update

Items Added by Revision

There were no agenda items added by revision.

Other Business

There was no other business.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 2:12 p.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Ben Elenbaas-via email 6/18/2024

Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk

Ben Elenbaas, Committee Chair

Kristi Felbinger, Minutes Transcription

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