THE HOUSING CRISIS: Business & Commerce Advisory Committee Recommendations

Presented to Whatcom County Council

July 9, 2019

OUR VISION

To fairly and equitably house residents as fast as possible in order to generate and maintain a productive, efficient, & dynamic economy in Whatcom County

DESIRED OUTCOME

To align affordable housing needs & priorities with workforce demand

DESIRED OUTCOME

For our children to be able to afford to live in the community they grew up in

DESIRED OUTCOME

For Whatcom County to be a leader and example for other communities in dealing with the Housing Crisis

RECOMMENDATION #1: DECLARE A HOUSING CRISIS

- Housing is not just a social problem, it is an **economic** problem

- Tight labor market & <u>no affordable workforce housing</u>

- Businesses cannot maintain or grow without workers nor can we recruit new companies to Whatcom County

RECOMMENDATION #2: USE THE CRISIS TO ALIGN CODES WITH COMMUNITY HOUSING GOALS

- Permitting process must be **simplified, streamlined, expedited, & solution driven**

- Use the crisis for wholesale change versus incremental change

- Use a neutral 3rd party to develop a new rule book that aligns with community goals
    - Completed and implemented by June 2020
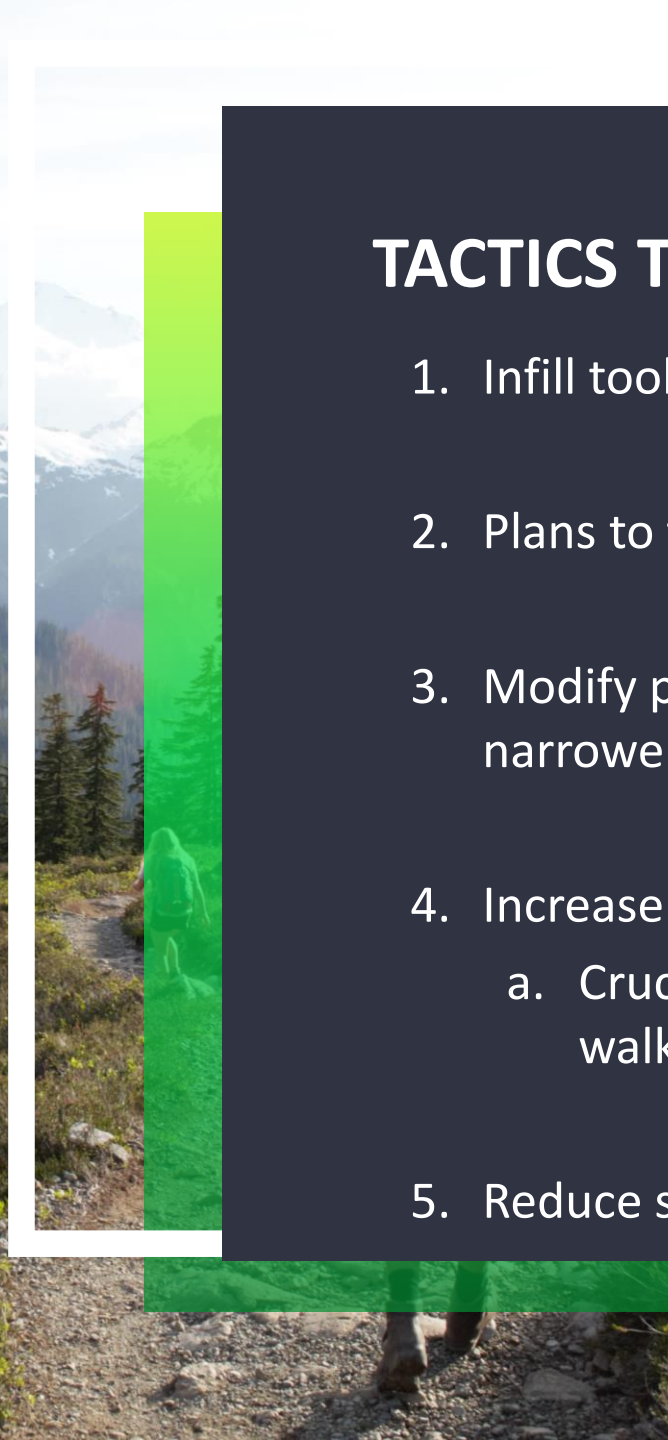
TACTICS TO ALIGN CODES WITH GOALS

1. Infill toolkit modifications

2. Plans to fill and grade for pad ready sites

3. Modify public works standards (smaller streets, narrower easements, etc.)

4. Increase allowable height/density limits
   a. Crucial for worker housing near transportation / walkable

5. Reduce set backs

TACTICS TO ALIGN CODES WITH GOALS

5. Reduce or eliminate commercial space requirements, allow affordable housing to be in other zones

6. Reduce or eliminate parking requirements

7. Expedited permitting process for green builds, affordable housing, low-income housing (within 2 weeks)

8. Reduce staff discretion and eliminate staff discretion when it comes to style guides / codes

9. Reduce the time for rezoning or comprehensive plan changes

TACTIC:
ANNEX OUTLYING AREAS

1. Increase the land supply

2. Much of Bellingham's remaining land is in critical areas

3. Much of the County land is not currently serviced by infrastructure or utilities, two easy ways to increase the supply quickly:
   a. Make short platting easier, simpler, faster
   b. Make it easier for existing owners to permit ADUs & DADUs

RECOMMENDATION #3: PROVIDE INCENTIVES

- Increase supply of workforce housing quickly

- Incentivize specific community development goals

- Build a culture around incentives, inclusion & saying yes versus constraints, limits, and exclusion

Tactics for incentives:
Provide infrastructure & resources to increase worker housing supply

1. Develop publicly owned wetland mitigation banks
   a. We recommend that the COB expedite the mitigation credit bank
   b. Revert back to prior buffers as the DOE has allowed
2. Identify funding for infrastructure
   a. REP is working on data collection project that will help prioritize the highest ROI projects, to be complete by 12/31/2019
3. Provide additional planning services to developers
4. Recruit outside developers
5. Provide education to planning & permitting staff about the entire property development process
   a. REP could help implement this strategy

Tactics for incentives:
Reduce government fees

1. Eliminate or reduce WSST on residential units
   a. The County should **lobby** WA State
   b. Adds 10% on to the cost of housing
2. Eliminate or reduce impact fees
   a. Park impact fees are too high
   b. Traffic impact fees are too high
3. Reduce system development charges

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE TO WHATCOM COUNTY'S BUSINESS COMMUNITY

1. The average rental vacancy rates returns to 4-7+%

2. The average available housing supply is 4-7+ months

3. Housing availability can be used as a tool for retention and recruitment for Whatcom County businesses

ENDORSED BY BUSINESS & COMMERCE COMMITTEE VOTING MEMBERS

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Committee Vice Chair Clark Campbell, CEO, Gearaid

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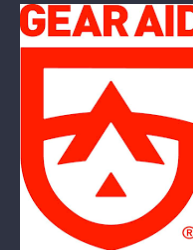
Andrew Gamble, CEO, Petrogas

Troy Muljat, CEO, The Muljat Group

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THANK YOU

Never let a good crisis go to waste!

-Rahm Emanuel