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Mark Personius
Director

Memorandum

November 22, 2021

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

From: Matt Aamot, Senior Planner

Through: Mark Personius, Director

RE: Review & Evaluation (Buildable Lands) Program - Methodology

The Washington State legislature amended the Growth Management Act (GMA) in 1997 to include a "review and evaluation program," also known as the buildable lands program (RCW 36.70A.215). At that time, the review and evaluation program applied to six counties: Clark, King, Kitsap, Pierce, Snohomish, and Thurston. The State legislature amended the GMA in 2017 to add Whatcom County to the list of counties required to undertake a review and evaluation program ([ESSSB 5254](#)).

The review and evaluation program has several main components, which are summarized below:

- Determining whether a county and its cities are achieving urban densities within urban growth areas by comparing growth and development assumptions contained in the county and city comprehensive plans with actual growth and development that has occurred;
- Determining whether there is sufficient land that is suitable for development in the future; and
- Identifying reasonable measures, if necessary, to reduce the differences between growth assumptions contained in comprehensive plans and actual development patterns ([RCW 36.70A.215](#)).

The 2017 State legislation (ESSSB 5254) imposes new requirements that Whatcom County must address, in close coordination with the cities, by June 30, 2022.

The City/County Planner Group, with the assistance of a consultant, has developed a draft *Whatcom County Review and Evaluation Program Methodology* to implement the 2017 state amendments to the GMA. The Methodology addresses several main topics:

- ✓ State Requirements
- ✓ Data Collection
- ✓ Evaluation of Land Suitable for Development
- ✓ Buildable Lands Report format
- ✓ Reasonable Measures

The Public Participation Plan (April 2020) indicates that staff will brief the Council on the draft Methodology. However, since the Methodology is a technical document that will be adopted administratively by the County Planning Director, we are not asking for a Council motion.

The Cities and County are conducting analyses of buildable lands in accordance with the Methodology. The City/County Planner Group will issue a comprehensive Buildable Lands Report, summarizing the results of these analyses, in 2022. The Planning Commission will hold a public hearing on the Buildable Lands Report next year and make a recommendation to the County Council, who will take action to formally approve the Report.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter. We look forward to discussing it with you.