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Mark Personius
Director

Memorandum

October 8, 2018

TO: The Honorable Jack Louws, Whatcom County Executive
The Honorable Whatcom County Council

FROM: Matt Aamot, Senior Planner *WA*

THROUGH: Mark Personius, Director *MP*

RE: Density Credit Program – Comp Plan Amendments (PLN2018-00002)

The Whatcom County Council adopted a policy in the 2016 Comprehensive Plan update that included convening a multi-stakeholder work group, including the Cities, to examine a variety of transfer of development right (TDR) and purchase of development right (PDR) issues.

In accordance with this policy, the County Executive appointed the Whatcom County TDR/PDR Multi-Stakeholder Work Group in February 2017. The Work Group met a total of 15 times between March 2017 and October 2018. The Work Group issued final recommendations on October 3, 2018.

The primary recommendation of the TDR/PDR Work Group is to transition from a traditional TDR program, which has not worked well in the past, to a density credit program. In a density credit program, a developer voluntarily makes a cash payment (instead of purchasing TDRs) to access development incentives (such as density bonuses). Any cash raised through this program would provide supplemental funding to the County's PDR program to help protect agricultural and rural areas. The density credit model is a simple and efficient tool that could allow increased development in cities, UGAs, and other designated areas while providing additional funding for purchasing development rights in agricultural and rural areas and, potentially, for city amenities. Therefore, the subject Comprehensive Plan amendments propose a shift in emphasis from a traditional TDR program to a density credit program.

The TDR/PDR Work Group made preliminary recommendations relating to the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan amendments on March 7, 2018. It was discussed at this March 7 meeting that the Planning Commission may review these preliminary recommendations prior to issuance of the Work Group's final report.

The County Planning Commission recommended approval of these amendments on July 12, 2018. The TDR/PDR Work Group issued their final recommendations on October 3, 2018, which did not modify their preliminary Comprehensive Plan amendment recommendations from March.

We are now requesting Council review of the amendments and anticipate that the County Council would make a final decision in 2019, when all comprehensive plan amendments are reviewed concurrently.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. We look forward to discussing it with you.