

**COUNTY-WIDE PLANNING POLICIES**

(Adopted April 1993, Revised March 11, 1997)

**A. CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT**

1. The county and the cities shall cooperate to provide public education on the requirements of the Growth Management Act.
2. The county and the cities shall provide opportunities for citizens to become involved in the growth management planning process through various mechanisms, such as surveys, public workshops, meetings, hearings, and advisory committees. The method of citizen involvement may vary based on the needs and constituents in various communities and shall include representation of both rural and urban interests on those issues that affect both urban and rural areas.
3. Citizens shall be notified in a timely manner of opportunities to have input and key decision points in the planning process. This should include actions such as use of telephone hotlines, notification to interest groups, pre-development meetings, early incorporation of public comments and broader notification of property owners and residents during a planning process as well as working more extensively with community and neighborhood groups. The cities shall also develop a public participation process to solicit and incorporate comments from residents outside city limits but within proposed Urban Growth Areas.
4. Citizen comments and viewpoints shall be incorporated into the decision-making process in development of draft plans and regulations. Consideration of citizen comments shall be evident in the decision-making process.
5. The county and the cities shall establish a system for subarea, community and neighborhood liaison to foster communication between the respective government and its neighborhoods. This system would also provide a point of contact for issues that may affect subareas, the community, or neighborhoods.
6. Various planning techniques, such as overlay maps and Geographic Information Systems, shall be utilized to allow citizens and public officials the ability to make accurate comparison of issues so appropriate trade-offs can be consciously made.

**B. URBAN VERSUS RURAL DISTINCTIONS\***

1. Whatcom County shall primarily become a government of rural areas in land use matters directed towards agriculture, forestry and other natural resources and

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natural resource based industries. The county shall work with citizens to define a variety of types of rural areas based on the characteristics and needs of different areas. This Section shall not preclude county governance of large urban industrial areas outside of the city UGA's (see Cherry Point below), developed urban areas within urban growth areas not yet annexed, and developed rural areas where the "urban" designation is inappropriate.

2. The county shall discourage urban level development outside Urban Growth Areas and outside of areas currently characterized by a development threshold greater than a rural development density.
3. Consistent with the character of existing development, and the ability to provide needed services, Whatcom County shall allow infill of rural areas characterized by existing commercial, industrial, and intensive residential development greater than a rural development density and rural settlements. These areas should be clearly delineated, and not expanded. Impacts on critical areas and other environmental considerations as well as the availability of capital facilities and rural levels of service must be considered before allowing infill in these areas.
4. Whatcom County shall promote appropriate land uses and allow for infill within rural settlements consistent with the community character, environmental constraints and the ability to provide needed infrastructure and needed services.
5. In the next 20 years, Whatcom County should discourage "new fully contained communities" (as defined and authorized by RCW 36.70A.350) outside designated Urban Growth Areas.
6. Whatcom County should undertake a public process to define rural areas and rural growth as distinct from urban areas and urban growth.

### **C. URBAN GROWTH AREAS**

1. Urban growth needs shall be met by a combination of in-fill within cities and by growth within designated municipal and non-municipal Urban Growth Areas.
2. The size and location of Urban Growth Areas shall be consistent with adopted local policies and with the capital facilities plans.
- 3a. The most current, accurate population projections based on a range provided for Whatcom County by the Office of Financial Management shall be used as the basis for determining that Urban Growth Areas shall include sufficient area to permit the urban growth that is projected to occur in the county for the succeeding twenty-year period.
- 3b. The determination of each Urban Growth Area shall be based upon a land needs analysis that incorporates reasonable market factors and addresses the ability of

the area to provide for urban levels of density and services. Urban areas shall permit a range of densities and uses. In recognition of local diversity, the market factor and range of densities used may be different among each Urban Growth Area.

4. Urban Growth Areas shall be evaluated at least every ten years to determine if they contain sufficient area to accommodate the urban growth that is projected for the succeeding twenty-year period. The market factor for each Urban Growth Area shall also be evaluated to determine whether the land supply is adequate to meet the needs of the community or whether the land supply is excessive and contributing to sprawl.
5. The county and the cities shall develop an approach to calculating the need for additional land area taking into consideration limitations imposed by individual critical areas regulations and other considerations such as infrastructure, open space, existing uses and market availability of undeveloped acreage.
6. The county and the cities shall coordinate drainage, stormwater management and flood control in Urban Growth Areas and work toward the development of common standards.
7. Urban Growth areas should be established in a way that minimizes impacts on agricultural land, forestry, mineral resources, water resources, and critical areas.

**D. CITY URBAN GROWTH AREAS**

1. The Urban Growth Areas for the small cities shall be of an adequate size to allow them to become viable economic centers with a balance of jobs and housing. The small cities shall do appropriate planning to ensure adequate distribution of land uses and services at a range of urban densities and zoning classifications.
2. Urban Growth Areas for cities shall include those areas contiguous to cities and with urban characteristics as defined by the Act.
3. Cities shall develop a plan to provide urban level water and sewer services within their Urban Growth Areas. This plan should be developed in cooperation with existing water purveyors and other municipal corporations providing water or sewer services within each city's Urban Area, and should be implemented through interlocal agreements. Short term and long term boundaries may be used to facilitate provision of urban levels of service and to not preclude future urban densities as defined within the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan.
4. Existing cities should absorb additional population at a range of densities appropriately responsive to the city's community vision before extending city Urban Growth Areas into areas where growth would adversely impact critical areas and resource lands. In those small cities entirely surrounded by flood

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plains, critical area and resource lands, the county and the city shall seek to negotiate a balance between protection of resources and the allocation of adequate land area to meet the growth needs of the city and to maintain the desired character of the community.

5. All cities should grow in an efficient manner while maintaining their character and, where reasonable, shall provide for adequate open space between cities to prevent strip development.
6. Cities should be encouraged to provide positive incentives for in-fill.

### **E. NON-CITY URBAN GROWTH AREAS**

1. Urban Growth Areas may also be established in areas that are not contiguous to existing cities, and are already characterized by urban growth where adequate facilities and services can be provided and which are intended to meet needs not met by cities and their Urban Growth Areas.
2. Non-city urban growth areas, for already urbanized unincorporated residential areas shall be encouraged to infill in a way that will facilitate efficient provision of facilities and services consistent with the scale of development.
3. Cherry Point shall be designated as an urban industrial growth area in recognition of existing large scale industrial land uses. Additional large-scale development shall be encouraged consistent with the ability to provide needed services and consistent with protecting critical areas along with other environmental protection considerations. The Cherry Point industrial area is an important and appropriate area for industry due to its access to deep water shipping, rail, all-weather roads, its location near the Canadian border, and its contribution to the County's goal of providing family wage jobs.
4. The County shall assure that there are plans to provide appropriate levels of urban facilities and services within non-city Urban Growth Areas. These plans should be developed by special purpose districts, water associations and private service providers within each of these Areas, and should be implemented, where appropriate, through interlocal agreements. Short term and long term boundaries may be used to facilitate provision of urban levels of service.

### **F. CONTIGUOUS, ORDERLY DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING IN URBAN GROWTH AREAS\***

1. Cities, the county and special districts shall execute interlocal agreements to coordinate plans for and manage growth in Urban Growth Areas prior to annexations. Interlocal agreements shall acknowledge and implement the County-wide Planning Policies.

2. Interlocal agreements shall incorporate clear and reasonable criteria for orderly annexation. The county and the cities shall establish a process to incorporate citizen input into interlocal agreement and encourage appropriate districts to participate. If adequate procedures are developed to replace it, the Boundary Review Board may be replaced.
3. All urbanized areas currently within urban growth boundaries associated with cities should be encouraged to annex to cities. Orderly annexations with logical boundaries shall be encouraged. Interlocal agreements shall specify guidelines on size, timing of annexations and urban levels of development, and tax revenue sharing when appropriate.
4. Within Urban Growth Areas, cities shall not extend water and sewer utilities without an adopted program for annexation and an adopted Capital Facilities Plan. Exceptions may be made in cases where human health is threatened as determined by the County Health Department. If water extensions are made, they shall be consistent with the service area boundaries and other provisions within the adopted Coordinated Water System Plan.
5. In the areas where utilities presently extend beyond city limits, but are within Urban Growth Areas, the city, county, and the existing water purveyors for the area should jointly plan with the county. The County shall adopt zoning which reflects this joint planning.
6. Cities, other municipal corporations, and other public and private utilities shall not extend urban levels of water service to serve urban uses outside Urban Growth Areas. If water extensions are made outside of Urban Growth Areas, the maximum number of connections shall be consistent with current zoning and the number of connections shall be specified in a legally binding document at the time the extension is approved. Property contiguous to extension of utilities necessary to solve existing water deficiencies, but which cannot benefit from them because of zoning constraints, shall not be assessed for those improvements.
7. The availability of pipeline capacity required to meet local needs and/or supply shall not be used to justify development counter to the county-wide land development pattern and shall not be considered in conversions of agricultural land, forestry, and rural areas.
8. The cities, other municipal corporations, public utilities, and the county shall cooperate to identify and balance the needs of each jurisdiction and entity when planning for transition of services and annexation within Urban Growth Areas. This intergovernmental cooperation and coordination should be reflected in revenue agreements, work programs for joint projects, and regional solutions adopted by the affected parties.

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9. Within Urban Growth Areas, major transportation, utility and greenway corridors should be planned. Development should be consistent with these corridors. The county should ensure conformance through the permit process and incentive programs.
10. Interlocal agreements shall include provisions for agreed upon development standards within Urban Growth Areas. Unless a different standard is negotiated, the more rigorous of the standards shall be enforced by the county.
11. The county and the City of Bellingham shall establish through the current (north) Urban Fringe Subarea Plan update, the policies, zoning and criteria to comply with current state Growth Management law. A similar process shall be used in planning for other areas around Bellingham.
12. To encourage contiguous, orderly development and annexation in Urban Growth Areas around cities, the county shall designate Urban Residential zones limiting density to a maximum of one dwelling unit per five acres in undeveloped areas until urban level utilities are provided. Developed or partially developed areas presently zoned Residential-Rural shall retain that zoning. In the Bellingham Urban Growth Area, substantial development and subdivisions already have occurred without annexation. The revised Urban Fringe Subarea Plan and a new Interlocal Agreement between the City of Bellingham and the county will address sequence and timing for annexations, subdivisions, and urban levels of development.
13. In Urban Growth Areas where development is occurring based on the presence of utilities, urban development shall meet common urban standards including fire flow requirements and supply. The county and the cities will work together to develop reasonable standards over time.

### **G. AFFORDABLE HOUSING\***

1. The county and the cities shall develop a definition for affordable housing. They should take actions to ensure a balance of housing and economic growth consistent with each jurisdictions' employment base and diverse income levels and to reduce commuting times and traffic congestion.
2. The county and the cities shall plan for a range of housing types and costs commensurate with their affordable housing needs.
3. Affordable housing should be convenient to public transportation, major employment centers and public services.
4. The county and the cities shall promote innovative techniques and develop strategies to provide for affordable housing with design, density, lot sizes and development standards that provide for a variety of housing types.

5. The county and the cities shall review existing regulations and policies that exclude or discourage affordable housing in their communities and shall not adopt regulations and policies which do so. Mobile, modular, and manufactured homes on individual lots, mobile home parks, accessory units, inclusionary zoning, mixed use, and increased densities shall be reviewed as affordable housing alternatives.
6. The county and the cities should work with the private sector, other public and non-profit agencies, citizen groups, and trade representatives to assure that there is an adequate supply of sites available for affordable housing and to encourage housing design that is compatible with the surrounding neighborhoods.
7. Low income housing shall not be concentrated in only a few communities or neighborhoods.
8. The county and the cities shall consider reducing impact and/or mitigation fees for affordable housing provided in a proposed development.
9. Each jurisdiction should explore options for providing shelter for the homeless.

**H. OPEN SPACE/GREENBELT CORRIDORS**

1. Adequate open space is vital to the quality of life and sense of place in Whatcom County. The county, cities, Port of Bellingham, and other appropriate jurisdictions should coordinate protection of linked greenbelts, within and between Urban Growth Areas, parks, and open space to protect wildlife corridors and to enhance recreational opportunities, public access and trail development.
2. The county and the cities shall plan for greenbelts and open space in their Comprehensive Planning processes and coordinate with each other. Open space systems should include lands, which contain natural areas, habitat lands, natural drainage features, and/or other environmental, cultural and scenic resources. With increased residential densities, jurisdictions also should ensure provision of adequate neighborhood parks and play areas within safe bicycling and walking distance for children.
3. The county and the cities shall encourage, to the extent it is feasible, separation of Urban Growth Areas through planning, zoning, development regulations, open space purchase, conservation easements and other mechanisms which may be appropriate. Also, an array of incentives such as density bonuses, design flexibility and transferable development rights shall be offered to affected land owners.

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### **I. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYMENT\***

1. Whatcom County recognizes that a healthy economy which provides opportunity for diverse segments of the community is important to the quality of life in the area. As noted in the County Overall Economic Development Plan, family wage jobs are an important component for the economic health of the county. New industrial development and expansion of existing industry are key factors in providing family wage jobs and a strong tax base.
2. Industrial land designations must be sufficient to permit the concentration of industry in appropriate locations beyond 20 years. This is necessary in order to avoid creating a demand for new industrial centers and industrial grade utilities beyond the 20-year horizon of the current plan. Industrial designations must not only include lands suitable for development, but also lands suitably zoned to create air shed, noise shed, and other buffers to prevent unreasonable limitation on industrial growth and development. It is also important that these lands be conserved with appropriate land use and zoning provisions to ensure that they will be available for future use.
3. In order to attract new industry and provide for expansion of existing industries, the county and the cities will designate land supply of sufficient size and diversity to provide a range of suitable locations for industrial development.
4. The county and the cities should include an economic development element in their Comprehensive Plans. Economic development elements should be consistent with the County's Overall Economic Development Plan. Economic development shall be coordinated with environmental concerns to protect the quality of life.
5. The county and the cities should continue to cooperate in preparing the "Overall Economic Development Plan" for infrastructure funding. Other appropriate organizations, businesses, and individuals will continue to be involved in the process.
6. Economic vitality and job development shall be encouraged in all the cities and in designated areas of the county consistent with community growth policies, particularly addressing adequacy of transportation corridors, public transportation, impacts on the environment, and the ability of the area to provide urban services.
7. Economic development that pays family wage rates should be encouraged.
8. Economic development shall be encouraged that: a) does not adversely impact the environment; b) strikes a balance with the community and encourages industry or development that gives jobs to local people; c) addresses

unemployment problems of the county and seeks "innovative techniques" to attract different industries for a more diversified economic base; d) promotes reinvestment of profits in the local economy, and e) supports expansion of existing businesses.

9. The County and the cities recognize the need for the protection and utilization of natural resources and resource lands including agricultural, mineral, forestry and fishing. As part of a broad based economy, productive timber, agriculture and fisheries industries should be maintained in a sustainable manner. As part of the comprehensive planning process and through implementation of the comprehensive plan, the County shall develop and adopt goals, policies and regulations that protect resource land industries and support and encourage resource-based industries.
10. The cities and county agree to set policies for approving proposals to authorize siting of Major Industrial Developments as per RCW 36.70A.365.
11. Whatcom County encourages siting of industrial uses in proximity to and to further utilization of our access to deep water for shipping, rail, roadways and the international border.

**J. COUNTY-WIDE TRANSPORTATION FACILITIES AND STRATEGIES\***

1. A Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) has been established in Whatcom County to conduct regional, cooperative transportation planning. The RTPO has completed a Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) including County-wide transportation policies. The RTP has been approved by a regional transportation Policy Board consisting of elected representatives of most area jurisdictions. The Transportation Chapter of the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan and the Comprehensive Plans for each of the City's must be consistent with the RTP as it is amended. The county and the cities will continue to support the RTPO on an on-going basis to coordinate transportation planning across Whatcom County.
2. Whatcom County jurisdictions shall encourage alternative modes of transportation to the single occupancy vehicle. Each jurisdiction will encourage:  
1) Public education to encourage use of public transportation; 2) Development of linked on-street bicycle routes and pedestrian and bicycle trail corridors; 3) Adequate pedestrian facilities; 4) Links, including well designed pedestrian links, between different modes of transportation; and 5) Intermodal linkage of freight transportation. Public transportation includes fixed route transit, car pools, van pools, and other demand responsive modes.
3. To facilitate alternatives to the single occupancy vehicle, pedestrian scale communities, and higher density shall be encouraged within Urban Growth Areas in areas with good access to major arterials and public transportation.

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4. Strategies for maintaining established levels of service on county roads shall include Commute Trip Reduction activities, project impact and/or mitigation fees, improved public transportation service, and/or other demand-based techniques intended to reduce or limit development induced increases in traffic congestion. Where these methods cannot maintain or cause return to established levels of service, development will be limited.
5. Priorities shall be established and expenditures coordinated for county-wide bicycle and trail corridors.
6. Transportation planning within Whatcom County shall incorporate inter-county and international transportation links, such as airports, passenger rail, freight rail, transit, ferries, and other transportation facilities.

### **K. SITING OF PUBLIC FACILITIES\***

1. As part of the comprehensive planning process, the county and the cities shall identify appropriate land for public facilities which meets the needs of the community, such as schools, recreation, transportation and utility corridors, human service facilities, and airport and other port facilities. In order to reduce land use conflicts, policies related to a design component shall be incorporated in the comprehensive plans.
2. The county and the cities shall develop a cooperative and structured process, which includes early and continuous public involvement, to consider siting of public facilities of a regional and statewide nature, such as solid waste disposal, correctional, transportation, education and human service facilities. State facilities will conform to local siting procedures.
3. Public facilities that generate substantial travel demand should be sited along or near major transportation and public transit corridors.
4. The county and the cities shall work with their respective school district to encourage siting of schools in conjunction with areas where substantial development is projected and near public transportation corridors.
5. Sharing of corridors for major utilities, trails and other transportation rights-of-way is encouraged when not in conflict with goals to protect wildlife, public health and safety.
6. Essential public facilities will not be precluded from consideration within Whatcom County as required by GMA. A process consistent with GMA and the County-wide Planning Policies will be developed to address the siting of essential public facilities.

**L. IMPACT FEES**

1. The county and the cities are encouraged to adopt fair and reasonable impact and/or mitigation fee ordinances to ensure that new growth pays its fair share of the cost of capital facilities, such as transportation improvements, parks, and schools.
2. The county and cities shall coordinate with their school districts to develop impact fee formulas as appropriate to the district's capital needs.
3. The county should coordinate with each city to encourage standardized formulas for the assessment and the collection of impact and/or mitigation fees.

**M. INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION**

1. To adequately plan for growth and implement the policies of the Growth Management Act, the governmental jurisdictions in Whatcom County, including the Lummi Nation and Nooksack Tribe, and the Port of Bellingham shall establish on-going mechanisms to improve communication, information sharing and coordinated approaches to common problems.
2. Whatcom County governments should communicate with neighboring counties and governments in British Columbia and work cooperatively on growth management issues that cross county and national borders.

**N. WATER QUALITY AND QUANTITY**

The quality of life and economic health of Whatcom County communities depend on the maintenance of a safe and reliable water supply. All jurisdictions and water purveyors should cooperate to ensure the protection and quality of the area's water resources.

1. The cities, and the county, in cooperation with other municipal corporations, tribal governments, federal and state agencies, and public and private utilities shall cooperate in conserving water and in drawing upon said water to support growth.
2. The Cities and the County in cooperation with other municipal corporations and tribal governments, shall adopt zoning regulations and development standards to protect water resources. Those regulations and development standards shall protect potable water supplies and water resources when there are conflicts with designations required by the Growth Management Act.
3. All jurisdictions shall cooperate to protect water quality and quantity within watersheds and marine water bodies which cross jurisdictional boundaries.

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4. Jurisdictions involved in the development of ground and/or surface water management plans shall pursue the adoption and implementation of the plans and integrate the plans into local comprehensive plans.
5. All jurisdictions should participate in the process to establish a county-wide water resource management body.
6. All jurisdictions should maximize reduction of water pollutants from stormwater runoff and combined sewer overflows.

### **O. FISCAL IMPACT\***

It is recognized that implementation of the Growth Management Act will promote more efficient growth patterns which may result in a reduced cost of public services and facilities in the longterm. It is also recognized that if the Growth Management Act and these policies are implemented to their maximum extent, county government may eventually lose the tax base needed to operate essential services, including the criminal justice function and the Offices of Treasurer, Assessor, and Auditor, which serve all jurisdictions in the area.

1. An economic analysis of changes in revenue caused by the Growth Management Act shall be provided by the County to the extent that resources are provided by the state.
2. If revenue sharing or fees for services are needed beyond those presently provided by state law, the county and the cities should seek state legislation to address the issue.

### **P. PRIVATE PROPERTY RIGHTS**

1. As required in the Growth Management Act, private property shall not be taken for public use without just compensation having been made. It is not the purpose of this paragraph to expand or reduce the scope of private property already provided in local, state and federal law.
2. The county as required by Whatcom County Home Rule Charter Section 1.11, and cities should establish a pro-active process to anticipate potential takings and other private property issues, including impacts on downstream property owners, and resolve them out of court.