



PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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BELLINGHAM COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE CONTENT AND PROCESS OUTLINE

Revised July 2011

What was the original comp plan update project scope and timeline?

Cities and counties are required to periodically update their comprehensive plans. In our case, state law required us to adopt an updated plan by December 1, 2014. Staff developed a project scope and timeline based on this deadline. In 2010, both the Planning Commission and City Council reviewed and approved the original project scope and timeline.

What has happened to cause staff to rethink the project?

In May, the State Legislature approved and the Governor signed a bill into law changing to update deadline to June 30, 2016. This was done primarily because the State recognizes the significant burden the update requirement places on local jurisdictions. In past years when updates were required, the State provided grant funding to help offset the significant costs associated with a comprehensive plan update process. Unfortunately, there is no state grant money available at this time and none is expected in 2012.

Staff reviewed the implications of the change in State law on the existing project scope and schedule. Our review suggests that changes to the original project scope are appropriate at this time.

Considering the changed State deadline, what options are available to the City?

Staff identified and reviewed three options:

1. Continue with the current project scope and timeline. The current scope includes a limited update to be completed in 2012.
2. Reduce the current project scope, and defer the major update to meet the new 2016 deadline. Reassign staff resources to other projects as appropriate.
3. Delay the entire project with the intent of completing the work by the 2016 deadline.

After reviewing the options with the City Attorney's Office, the Mayor and CAO, and other Whatcom County jurisdictions, Staff determined that Option 2 is the appropriate course at this time.

Option 2 would include:

- Creating a new Economic Development chapter as requested by the Planning Commission and City Council.
- Creating a new Environment chapter as recommended by staff.
- Updating the Annexation Phasing Plan, including a cost of services study for the Geneva and Hillsdale areas as requested by the City Council.
- Revising the Capital Facilities chapter to address recently adopted changes to utility extension policies and rules.
- Adding the goals from the new Shoreline Master Program (GMA requirement).
- Adding a Pedestrian Master Plan component to the Transportation chapter.

This option would address current needs while recognizing that there are insufficient resources available for a full and complete update.

Option 2 would NOT include adding the population growth forecasts and changes to the UGA boundary approved by the County in 2010, or any other changes to the Land Use and other chapters.

The following factors cause staff to recommend Option 2:

1. The City's current plan was adopted in 2006. It is a 20-year plan that is fully GMA compliant. Staff from all departments have been working since 2006 to implement the goals and polices. Implementation is a higher priority, in our opinion, than using limited staff resources to complete a partial update of the plan when none is required.
2. If the comprehensive plan is updated now, the entire process will have to be repeated beginning in about two years to meet the 2016 deadline. Staff was comfortable updating the plan in 2012 to satisfy the 2014 deadline. Now that the deadline has been revised to 2016, we don't believe that a minor 2012 update will be sufficient to address the requirements of the 2016 deadline. By 2016, Bellingham's comprehensive plan will be 10 years old. This is the appropriate time to review the growth forecasts and other assumptions and policies in the plan.

For the 2016 update, new population and employment growth forecasts, an updated land capacity analysis and other baseline data covering the 2016-2036 planning period will need to be created. This will include new discussions regarding land supply and the UGA boundary.

3. Under Option 2, staff would continue work begun on the new Economic Development and Environment chapters and the update to the Annexation Phasing Plan as requested

by the City Council in 2010. This work could occur at a more measured pace and in a more comprehensive way. Adoption target is still mid-year 2012. In other words, no preliminary work completed so far will be lost as a result of the change in project scope.

4. The scope of the current project is very limited, and does not include a significant public participation component. This is due to the current limits on staff and consultant resources and, unlike in the past, there lack of State grant funds that have always been available to help offset the significant cost of the update process.

Under Option 2, there is time to plan for and budget the resources needed to complete a full update process. Also, State grant funds may be available to help offset the costs of a major undertaking like updating the comprehensive plan.

5. State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) review could be much more comprehensive than the current project scope allows, including completion of a new environmental impact statement if warranted.

6. Option 2 would make Bellingham consistent with the other cities in Whatcom County. None of the other cities are fully updating their plans at this time because of limits on staff resources and the fact that there is no assistance money from the State.

Planning staff from each of the jurisdictions are working on a "Planning Directors Agreement" that would establish a timeline and process for the 2016 update. This would ensure that all of the cities and the County are working together to update our plans with the same basic population and employment growth forecasts, land supply information and other data. Another significant benefit to this approach is that we could get the baseline data *early in the update process*.

7. Deferring the major update to later years would free up staff from Planning, Community Development, Public Works and Parks to work on other comprehensive plan implementation projects – projects such as, neighborhood planning activities and development code improvements.

Revised Timeline

- Complete all amendments listed under option 2 by mid-year 2012.
- Complete "Directors Agreement" for 2016 update by end of 2012.
- Begin work on 2016 update early in 2014.
- Complete comprehensive update by new GMA deadline - June 30, 2016.

Council Review

The City Council reviewed and approved this revised project scope and timeline on July 25, 2011.