



May 21, 2004

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**Hundreds of community members invited to participate in growth forum**

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City of Bellingham, Whatcom County and Whatcom Transportation Authority officials have invited about 400 people to participate in a comprehensive growth forum, designed to help shape decisions dealing with growth and maintaining the quality of life in our community.

“While we’re excited about our region’s potential, we’re also concerned about preserving the quality of life we enjoy,” Jorge Vega, Bellingham Planning and Community Development Director, said.

He said Bellingham and Whatcom County face big changes. According to projections, the county-wide population will grow by nearly 62,000 people over the next 20 years. The Bellingham area is expected to grow by more than 30,000 people.

“Bellingham and Whatcom County are repeatedly recognized nationally as an all-around great place to live, work and play, and keeping it that way is a challenge facing us all,” Vega said.

He said Bellingham, Whatcom County and Whatcom Transportation Authority officials want to engage the community in a process to develop specific strategies for dealing with the growth expected in our community.

Together, we’ve initiated a “Community Forum on Growth Management,” Vega said. The forum is a series of public meetings designed to help us understand, and plan for, the pressures of growth. Approximately 400 “delegates”, representing neighborhood groups, civic and business organizations, government agencies and others have been invited to participate in the forum. Other members of the community are invited to attend the meetings as observers, and meetings will be aired on Channel 10. Written comments will be accepted throughout the process.

Community members also are invited to learn more at a “drop-in” center, located in the Marketplace Building at 120 East Holly Street in Bellingham. Vega said it will be a place where people can come learn more about how our community can work together to understand and plan for growth. A grand opening event for the drop in center is planned for Friday, May 28, at 5:00 p.m.

At the conclusion of the forum series, a report containing specific recommendations for changes to Bellingham’s Comprehensive Plan will be presented to the city and county Planning Commissions, City and County councils and the Whatcom Transportation Authority Board. The Bellingham Planning Commission and City Council will hold public hearings later this year to consider any recommended changes to Bellingham’s Comprehensive Plan, giving people yet another opportunity to participate in these important issues and decisions.

A Spokane-based consulting firm, *Studio Cascade*, has been hired jointly to facilitate this process. Forum meetings will be informative *and* entertaining, with lectures, workshops, and field trips. Forum results will influence and become part of Bellingham’s updated Comprehensive Plan – the key document setting growth-related policy. Whatcom County and WTA will also use the results of the forum in their ongoing and future planning activities.

Forum meetings will be held at the Sehome High School Cafeteria, 2700 Bill McDonald Parkway in Bellingham according to the following schedule:

Meeting Schedule

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|---------------------|--|
| Saturday, June 5    | Workshop, 10:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.                 |
| Friday, June 18     | Workshop/open house, 5:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.       |
| Saturday, June 19   | Workshop/field trip, – 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.    |
| Wednesday, June 23  | Workshop/open house – 12:00 p.m.- 9:00 p.m.      |
| Saturday, June 26   | Workshop – 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.                |
| Thursday, August 26 | Final workshop/open house, 5:30 p.m. - 9:00 p.m. |

For more information about the Community Forum on Growth Management, contact the Bellingham Planning and Community Development Department at 676-6982.

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