



## Scope and Schedule

June 2014

**State Mandate** - The State Growth Management Act (GMA) requires cities and counties to have a Comprehensive Plan and to update their plans periodically. The City's next Comprehensive Plan update must be completed and adopted by June 30, 2016.

One of the first steps in the update process was recently completed -- adopting, in conjunction with the other jurisdictions in Whatcom County, preliminary 20-year population and employment growth forecasts. These forecasts are the foundation of the plan. They are used to determine the amount of land needed to accommodate the growth, to anticipate and budget for new transportation facilities, schools, parks and other capital facilities, and to forecast the need for additional police and firefighters for example. The preliminary population forecast for Bellingham is 129,025 in 2036. This represents total growth of 35,900 new residents (48% of total countywide projected growth). The preliminary employment growth forecast is 22,641 (63% of total countywide employment growth).

Another significant component of the update requirement is the review of (UGA) boundaries. This includes determining the development capacity of the remaining vacant land in the City and UGA, converting population and employment growth forecasts to a demand for land, and determining if the available land supply within the city and UGAs has the capacity to accommodate the forecasted 20-year growth. If the demand is found to exceed the current supply, choices must be made regarding how the shortfall is to be addressed. The choices can include for example, increasing zoning capacity in areas of the city to accommodate more development, recommending the County add more land to the UGA, or revising the growth forecasts. These alternatives are addressed during the update process.

**Project Description** - The goal of the project is to develop a new GMA-compliant Comprehensive Plan for the City and UGA that serves as the guiding document for managing growth and development. The plan must cover the period from 2016 to 2036 and contain chapters on land use, housing, transportation, parks and recreation, capital facilities and utilities. Optional chapters include community design, environment and economic development. The City's current Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 2006 and covers the period from 2002-2022.

**State Funding** - Since the GMA was passed in 1990, the state has provided grant funds to help offset the significant costs associated with creating and updating Comprehensive Plans. The City has used these funds in the past to hire specialists to assist with the population/employment growth forecasts, and for the public participation aspects of the project, (for example the "Community Forum on Growth

Management" in 2004 for the current Comprehensive Plan). The state legislature has twice in recent years moved the GMA update deadline back (first to 2014 and then to 2016) because no state funding was available for local jurisdictions. At this time there are no state grant funds available to assist local jurisdictions in meeting GMA requirements for the 2016 update.

**Local Funding** - In 2013, an interlocal agreement was approved by the City Council appropriating \$60,500 for the City's share of consultant services to develop the population and employment growth forecasts, allocations to cities, and for the environmental work that will be needed in the UGA review process. That work is expected to be completed by the end of this year.

The 2014 budget includes \$60,000 for consultant services, to be used as needed for additional consultant services and activities. Additional funding may be needed in future years, depending on the number of growth scenarios reviewed.

**Public Participation** - The Growth Management Act requires that we offer the opportunity for "early and continuous" public participation in the update process; however, the form of public participation is left to local jurisdictions to determine. Staff's recommendations for public participation are included in the attached document.

**Environmental Review** - The County is producing a programmatic EIS for the update process; however, the city may need to complete additional environmental review of various growth scenarios in order for the public, Planning Commission and City Council to gain a thorough understanding of the impacts and tradeoffs associated with the population and employment growth forecasts. The costs associated with this environmental review can vary dramatically, depending on the number of growth scenarios examined and whether the work is done "in house" using existing staff or if consultants are used for some or most of the review.

## **Project Scope and Timeline**

### **2013 Tasks**

1. Develop the preliminary project scope, schedule and preliminary budget. *Completed*
2. Review and refine the County's Land Capacity Analysis methodology. *Completed*
3. Review and approve a cost sharing interlocal agreement with the County and other jurisdictions for consultant services to develop 2016-2036 population and employment growth forecasts and allocations to cities. *Completed*
4. Work with the County and other jurisdictions to update and consult with a group of elected officials from all the jurisdictions to oversee process. *Ongoing*

Staff Resources:           Assistant Director -- .4 FTE  
                                  Senior Planner -- .4 FTE  
                                  Senior GIS Analyst -- .2 FTE

### **2014 Tasks**

1. Approve a "non-binding resolution" with preliminary 2016-2036 population and employment growth forecasts and allocations to cities. *Completed*
2. Review and approve the project scope. *Completed*

3. Consult with planners from the County and jurisdictions within the County, as well as a group of elected officials, to oversee the process. *Ongoing*
4. Complete the Land Capacity Analysis. *Ongoing*
5. Prepare preliminary UGA boundary and growth scenarios alternatives. *Underway*
6. Work with the County to complete the programmatic DEIS. *Underway*
7. Begin updating the chapters of the plan. *Underway*

Staff Resources:       Assistant Director -- .5 FTE  
                               Senior Planner -- .5 FTE  
                               Senior GIS Analyst -- .2 FTE  
                               Planner 2 -- 1.0 FTE  
                               Transportation Planner -- .4 FTE

Add. Resources:       \$60,000 is allocated in the 2014 budget for targeted consultant work as needed for activities such as additional environmental review, transportation modeling and public participation. Public Works funds (for transportation system analysis) will also be available for the project.

### 2015 Tasks

1. Complete the County's SEPA review (FEIS).
2. Develop communication tools for the growth scenarios. This information is intended to demonstrate to the public, Planning Commission and City Council the impacts and tradeoffs associated with the population and employment growth forecasts.
3. Complete the updated Comprehensive Plan chapters.
4. Complete the Planning Commission's review of new chapters.

Staff Resources:       Assistant Director -- .75  
                               Senior Planner -- 1.0 FTE  
                               Environmental Planner -- .25 FTE  
                               Senior GIS Analyst -- .2 FTE  
                               Planner 2 -- 1.5 FTE  
                               PW Transportation Planner -- .4 FTE

Add. Resources:       None

### 2016 Tasks

1. Complete the City Council's review and adoption by the June 30, 2016, deadline.

Staff Resources:       Assistant Director -- .5 FTE  
                               Senior Planner -- .5 FTE  
                               Planner 2 -- .5 FTE  
                               PW Transportation Planner -- .2 FTE

Add. Resources:       None

Note: Additional resources for the project could be needed depending on a number of factors, including:

1. The scope of the plan update;
2. The scope of the public participation component;
3. If significant additional environmental review is needed and, if so;
  - If the work is contracted out to a consultant group or done in-house with existing City staff
  - The number of alternative growth scenarios studied; and
4. Whether resources are provided by the state (none expected).

**Project Scope - Staff Recommendation** - Bellingham's 2006 Comprehensive Plan was the result of an extensive process. It took approximately five years to complete. The goals and policies in the plan are still relevant and appropriate. The current plan directs that growth be accommodated primarily in:

- Urban villages, including downtown;
- Urban growth areas as they are deemed appropriate for annexation; and
- Existing city neighborhoods where appropriate.

Staff recommends a more limited and targeted approach to this update process. We suggest a major shift in the current plan's goal and policy direction is not needed at this time; however, a refinement and prioritization of the goals and policies is appropriate. The process should include a review of alternatives for accommodating the population and employment growth forecasts. Staff suggests using the recently-adopted Economic Development chapter a starting point in developing an updated chapter format for the remainder of the chapters.

As such, a "review and comment" public participation process is appropriate, where the public is invited to comment on the staff work products to the staff and various advisory groups, including the Transportation Commission, Parks Board, Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Commission, and Planning Commission. See the attached Public Participation Plan for details of the staff proposal.