



## Whatcom Chapter

### **DO NOT EXPAND THE BELLINGHAM URBAN GROWTH AREA BOUNDARIES**

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Whatcom County Council  
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On behalf of the Whatcom County chapter of Futurewise, thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important issue.<sup>1</sup> We believe there is no need to expand the UGA at all; Bellingham's existing boundaries are sufficient to accommodate planned population growth. However, we much prefer the county's proposal to expand the UGA by about 250 acres to the original Bellingham request for almost 2,200 acres.

Futurewise is a statewide nonprofit group, headquartered in Seattle, which focuses on Smart Growth. The Futurewise mission is to promote healthy communities and cities while protecting farmland, forests, and shorelines for this and future generations. Smart Growth emphasizes land-use patterns that accommodate increasing population in ways that benefit current and future residents. Such patterns focus development inside existing cities, where infrastructure already exists, minimizing the cost to taxpayers for these expensive capital investments. Such infill can provide a diversity of housing options within cities while protecting rural areas.

Here are some of the reasons why Futurewise Whatcom strongly believes that Bellingham (and the other Whatcom County cities) should grow within their existing boundaries:

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<sup>1</sup> For additional detail on our perspective on the Bellingham UGA, please see our August 4, 2007 written statement to the Whatcom County Council.

Futurewise Whatcom Steering Committee  
Rick Dubrow, Lynnea Flarry, Eric Hirst, Greg Kirsch,  
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- Accommodating population growth is more a policy issue than one of analysis. Regardless of what any land-supply analysis says,<sup>2</sup> the key issue is whether we want to grow up or out. We are delighted that the County Council has the long-term vision to require the cities to grow up. Otherwise, we would soon be living in BellingFern and then a few years later in BellFernLyn. Do our citizens really want to live in a never-ending suburb?
- With respect to what local citizens want, almost all the candidates for county and city office in last month's election emphasized their commitment to maintaining the quality of our wonderful lifestyle in Whatcom County. In order to meet that commitment, we must protect our declining stock of farmlands, forests, parks, wildlife habitat, and open space. The only way to protect and preserve our rural areas is to limit the outward expansion of our cities.
- At some point society will have to respond to resource scarcity—global climate change, peak oil, and water quality and quantity, among others. In Washington, 45% of the total greenhouse gas emissions is from transportation (a much higher percentage than for the nation as a whole). This high percentage emphasizes the long-term consequences of our land-use decisions. We must act now to stop sprawl and to concentrate development inside existing urban boundaries. This concentration of development is likely the best, perhaps the only, way to reduce motor vehicle use and the associated carbon emissions.
- Expanding UGA boundaries would encourage leapfrog development and lead to further fragmentation of Whatcom County farmland by implicitly encouraging urban-type developments in rural areas, both residential and commercial.
- Expanding the Bellingham UGA would *discourage* development in downtown Bellingham, the opposite of what we want. How will we create the vibrant waterfront on the GP site if we allow (even encourage) development in outlying areas?
- Finally, the County Council's decision on Bellingham's UGA will set a pattern for the other cities. Specifically, we hope the council will carefully and skeptically scrutinize inflated requests for additional land from the other Whatcom County cities.

In summary, Futurewise Whatcom continues to believe that Bellingham can accommodate all its planned growth within its current limits. Although we would prefer no expansion of the UGA, we respect and applaud the County Council for developing a more realistic proposal than the Bellingham one. If time permits, we urge the County Council to work with the new Bellingham Mayor (and city council, with three new members) to negotiate a settlement that calls for no expansion of the UGA and, therefore, best serves the long-run interests of our citizens.

If we are to maintain the many wonderful features of our natural and built environments, we must *manage* growth responsibly. We hope you will lead Whatcom County towards a long-term sustainable future that benefits citizens rather than special interests.

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<sup>2</sup> Our August 4, 2007 statement included an appendix that offered several technical comments on the (flawed, in our view) assumptions used in the Bellingham land-supply analysis related to inflated safety factor, overestimate of land needed for parks, and use of minimum densities in the existing UGA.