

Meeting Notes
Envision Skagit Citizen Committee
April 18, 2011
8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
Skagit County Administration Building

Attendees:

John Cheney
Kerri Cook
Peggy Flynn
Cory Ertel
Jim Meyer

Kim Mower
Grace Popoff
Doris Robbins
Tim Rosenhan
Nate Youngquist

Staff:

Kirk Johnson, Skagit Co. PM
Lisa Dally Wilson, Facilitator
Josh Greenberg, Skagit GIS
John Lombard, consultant
Mark Personius, consultant

Meeting Handouts:

1. Meeting Notes, April 1 CC Meeting (e-mailed)
2. Green Infrastructure: The Importance of Interconnected Open Space in the Urban Environment
3. Skagit Countywide UGA Open Space Concept Plan, January 2009 (Kerri's Abbreviated Summary)
4. Our Livable Skagit Plan Vision Statement
5. A Regional Vision: Stronger Regional Coordination, Collaboration and Cooperation
6. Tax Revenue Sharing as a Mechanism for Steering Land Use
7. Briefing Paper: Rural Villages & Fully Contained Communities (FCCs)
8. Decision Points for April 18, 2011 CC Working Session, Population Allocations and Urban Development

Committee Business

The meeting notes for April 1 were approved.

Contact with Cities/Towns. The CC discussed the relationship of elected officials to the CC's work and when and how the CC should share its draft recommendations with city elected officials. CC members agreed that they are very interested to hear comments from city/town elected officials, but they understand the committee's role is to serve as a voice for the public. They do not believe that the cities should "direct" which topics the CC addresses. Kirk said that was consistent with how the county reads the meeting minutes of the Growth Management Act Steering Committee when the process was agreed to.

After much discussion, the CC agreed to meet with city and town mayors (including those from Lyman, Hamilton and Concrete) and consider their comments prior to sharing their recommendations with the public. Prior to a public meeting on the recommendations, a written draft would be shared by e-mail with a broadly inclusive group to include city council members, tribal representatives, citizens on the project's listserv, and citizens who provided their e-mail address when attending a community meeting or presentation on the project.

Committee Homework. Lisa said she had only received a few comments on the homework questions relating to environmental issues from the final page of the April 1st decision point document. She requested that CC members who still want to provide input on those decision points do so prior to the CC meeting on April 29th. Lisa also made one final request for CC review comments on Goal Statement II – Protect Natural Resource Lands. She asked that hard copies of any proposed edits or comments

should be given to her at the end of the meeting or mailed to her so she receives them in advance of the CC meeting on April 29, preferably by April 25th.

Fiscal Analysis. Kirk noted that ECONorthwest had recently met with budget directors of local governments in Skagit County and would begin drafting its report on the fiscal costs of growth, and how those jurisdictions might be affected under the different future scenarios. The final analysis will not likely be available prior to the CC's May retreat, but some interim findings likely will.

Briefing of Envision Skagit Steering Committee. Lisa parked for future discussion a CC briefing of the project Steering Committee on its recommendations, suggesting that it could occur around the same time as the briefing of mayors.

Open Space and Trails

Kerri summarized the research she put into Handout #2. She emphasized that if we don't act in the near-term to preserve community open space, it will be lost as growth occurs over the next 50 years. The CC discussed the handout's recommendations. Kim asked for a clearer distinction between planning for open space, which the handout defines to include working farms and forests, and planning for non-motorized transportation. Kirk agreed to work with Kerri on proposed edits to the recommendations for the CC's review. The CC thanked Kerri for her good work.

Revenue Sharing, Regional Governance and Industrial Lands

Patsy Martin, Executive Director of the Port of Skagit County, joined the meeting for a short presentation on the Port's strategic plan for job creation. She focused on four points:

1. About one-third of workers who live in Skagit County commute out of the county for their jobs;
2. The average income of a four-person family in Skagit County is \$47,000, while a family income of about \$80,000 is needed before taxes cover the cost of public services (what Patsy termed a "sustainable community wage");
3. By 2060, there will be a need for about 3,300 acres of additional industrial land in the County (including a 25% market factor), while there is currently about 1,800 acres of unused industrial land available (this might equate to as little as 1,000 acres of usable land, taking critical areas and other factors into account); and
4. Skagit County's future industrial jobs are likely to be highly skilled, making high-value goods.

Patsy said that county has a great location to attract such jobs. She recommended that new industrial land be located outside of the floodplain and agricultural lands, in areas that are already served by utilities and roads. She said that locations upriver from Sedro Woolley are challenging because of their distance from I-5.

The CC then discussed Handout #4, a draft vision statement prepared by Tim, Peggy, and Cory. Tim noted their interest in offering a simple vision, getting away from details. The CC generally liked the opening statement as both concise and readable, but concerns were raised about the bulleted recommendations underneath it. Two suggested edits were suggested for the opening statement, addressing public safety and contiguous open spaces. Lisa suggested that a final CC vision statement might be followed by high-level recommendations, generally following the categories the project has been using.

Peggy reviewed her research for Handout #5 on regional coordination. She suggested that the “Reality Check” exercise that was done for the central Puget Sound area could be replicated for Skagit, potentially sponsored by Leadership Skagit. The CC discussed the handout, agreeing with its interest in a regional planning entity that would include non-governmental organizations as well as local governments. The CC generally supported the first paragraph and the associated bullets under “A Recommendation.” Grace asked that the statement emphasize inclusiveness. A final version in the CC’s recommendations should clarify whether or not (and why?) a revitalized Skagit Council of Governments is the best choice for the proposed regional planning entity.

Tim and Cory provided an overview of Handout #6, on tax revenue sharing. The CC supported developing the handout’s recommendation for an “industrial tax basket,” with Tim and Cory working on the details with Kirk. Kirk noted that it would be useful to consider whether it was possible to find 3,000+ acres of new land that was feasible to develop for industry and, if so, where should it go? That could possibly be included in the CC’s preferred future model scenario.

The CC discussed the wisdom of recommending the merger of Burlington and Mount Vernon, which might be an effective way to address current inequities in their populations and commercial/retail tax bases. No CC members were opposed to the concept, but they know it would be controversial and potentially draw attention away from other CC recommendations. Lisa asked that the subcommittee of Tim and Cory develop two or three alternatives for how this recommendation might be described in final CC recommendations by April 26, for discussion the afternoon of April 29 (that CC meeting now being extended to all-day).

Population Allocation, Urban and Rural Growth

Mark Personius provided an overview of Handout #7, on rural villages and fully contained communities (FCCs). He noted that only a few FCCs have been approved: Trilogy and Redmond Ridge in King County, and Cascadia in Pierce County. For both, a large timber owner held the land to be developed and was able to afford the high initial investment to make it feasible. There have been proposals to ban FCCs as not actually “contained” (meaning residents must regularly leave for work and shopping). He noted that, under the GMA, Local Areas of More Intensive Rural Development (such as Bow-Edison, Conway, or Alger) cannot be expanded, even if this was accomplished through transferring development rights from surrounding rural or resource land. Alger, with ready access to I-5 and a sewer line already running through it, might be the best candidate for urbanizing an existing rural village, but residents there oppose it.

The CC discussed the FCC that has been explored for Butler Hill. Kirk said he understood that it would accommodate about 5,000 people in the area around the Avalon golf course. Kirk said he had heard from the Skagit PUD director that the concept was raised in a PUD public meeting and met strong resistance from residents in the surrounding area.

Josh presented the current urban/rural ratios of the four future scenarios, based on the Envision model: Plan Trend, 74/26; Ecosystem, 86/14; Agriculture/Forestry, 67/33; and Economic Development, 39/40, with 21% in expanded rural villages or FCCs. Kirk noted that we have not been able to model new approaches to clustering rural development (revised CaRD policies), but the CC could still recommend them. Kirk also noted that it may be difficult to achieve the full urban growth projected for Bayview under even the plan trend. There are major gas transmission lines under the area proposed for

residential development that may affect build out potential. A drainage study projects it would cost about \$10 million to properly manage stormwater from a developed Bayview UGA.

The CC then reviewed Handout #8, decision points for population allocation and urban development. Some members favored an allocation of 80% urban, 5% rural, and 15% rural village or FCC. At least one member opposed allocating more population to Burlington, since essentially all of the city is in the floodplain and parts of it are in danger of fast, high flows if upstream levees break. Others said that it was too late to change the location of cities that are already in the floodplain. Lisa parked this issue for discussion at a future meeting.

Some members opposed FCCs as simply relabeling new growth in rural areas, in conflict with the overall intent of GMA. Others argued that FCCs and expanded rural villages could be out of the floodplain and agricultural areas, and could be required to transfer or purchase development rights from surrounding rural or resource lands. Others noted that FCCs already require a large initial cash investment, and that Butler Hill does not involve a large timber owner with deep pockets and existing development rights. Relying on FCCs and then having them not deliver could lead to an "80/20/25" allocation of growth. Some CC members recommended an 80/20 allocation, with an interest in clustering the rural/resource allocation as much as possible. Lisa summarized the general CC position on allocating growth to rural villages or FCCs as conditional on their achieving their densities through transfers or purchases of development rights, noting that some CC members considered this condition infeasible.

The CC discussed the urban growth questions in the handout. CC members favor greater density in cities, but do not want to make all of the specific decisions necessary to model a future scenario in Envision. Kirk offered to work with Josh to turn their general recommendations into a scenario, running the details past the CC. After some discussion of whether redevelopment should be encouraged in the floodplain, Josh noted that the Corps of Engineers' flood study is considering 40 options for flood management in Skagit Valley but is currently stalled because of lack of funds.

The CC briefly discussed rural growth and the existing CaRD system. Josh offered to provide the number of potential CaRD units that are available. Kirk said that Ed McMahon, who will be presenting at the Lincoln Theatre on April 28 and meeting with the CC the next morning, could show examples of good clustered rural developments.

Next Steps/Next Meeting

Lisa asked for CC comments on the draft natural resource recommendations by the next weekend, either mailing her a hard copy or e-mailing her written comments (but not in a track changes version of the document). She said she would reach out for comments from the agricultural members of the CC who were not present.

Kirk said that Ed McMahon's April 28 talk would present why communities don't have to give up what they value most as they grow, using examples, and would also discuss sustainable tourism. The next morning with the CC, Mr. McMahon will discuss green infrastructure and innovative land conservation and development strategies, as well as sustainable tourism. Kirk recommended attending both, but said CC members might want to focus just on their own meeting. The April 29 CC meeting will include pizza for lunch, followed by an afternoon work session.

Kirk said that the University of Washington's summary of Skagit-related research on climate change would be available to the CC before its May retreat, along with initial findings from ECONorthwest's fiscal impacts analysis. The retreat will be at the Padilla Bay Estuarine Reserve Interpretive Center.

4:35 Adjourn