

Meeting Notes
Envision Skagit Citizen Committee
April 29, 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
Gustavo Ramos, Jr.
Doris Robbins
Tim Rosenhan
Ryan Sakuma
Nate Youngquist

Staff:

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

Guests:

Ed McMahon, ULI
Kelly Mann, ULI-Seattle

Meeting Handouts:

1. Meeting Notes, April 18 CC Meeting (e-mailed)
2. The Place Making Dividend, Edward McMahon, Planning Commissioners Journal, Fall 2010
3. Density without High-Rises?, Edward McMahon, Planning Commissioners Journal, Spring 2009
4. Tourism and the Environment: What's the Connection?, Edward McMahon, Planning Commissioners Journal, Fall 1997
5. Conservation Communities, Edward McMahon, Urban Land, July/August 2010
6. Open Space Recommendation, Trail Recommendation, Kerri Cook
7. Our Livable Skagit Plan, Vision Statement, Tim Rosenhan, Peggy Flynn, Cory Ertel
8. Recommendations for Stronger Regional Coordination, Collaboration and Cooperation, Peggy Flynn
9. Industrial Tax Revenue Sharing Proposal, Tim Rosenhan, Peggy Flynn, Cory Ertel
10. Proposed Recommendation Regarding City Consolidation or Merger for Further Citizen Committee Consideration, Tim Rosenhan, Peggy Flynn, Cory Ertel
11. Map, Year 50, New Dwellings at 2060, Rural Development Rights, Skagit County GIS
12. Map, Year 50 UGA Expansion 2060, Charts, Skagit County GIS
13. Regional New Population at Year 50, New Population in Cities—50 years, Skagit County GIS
14. "Red Dot Maps", four 2060 scenarios, Skagit County GIS

Committee Business

The meeting notes for April 18 were approved with two amendments:

- The second sentence under "Contact with Cities/Towns" was amended to read: "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."
- In the first full paragraph of the fourth page, the sentence "No members supported an urban allocation of less than 80%" was deleted.

Meeting Protocol: Lisa noted that some CC members were content with the way the April 18 meeting went, while others were not. She said that when CC members present the results of their research, that should not count as part of the "air time" that every member is allowed. She said that when she herself

states recommendations or conclusions, she is attempting to mirror what she thinks she heard from the group, and that CC members should speak up if they disagree. CC members stated their interest in hearing from every member of the committee.

April 27 Public Meeting: Gus reported that the April 27 meeting that was targeted to the Latino community went very well. Ryan and Doris from the CC joined him at the meeting, as did Lisa and Kirk. Interests expressed for the future of Skagit County were similar to those heard at other public meetings, with additional interests in farm worker housing, affordable access to sports fields, and inclusion of the Latino community—particularly youth—in ongoing conversations about the county’s future.

Additional Photos: Ryan will provide photos from his recent trip to Spain. These photos show additional examples of higher density mixed use in rural villages and more urban environments. They will be posted on the project ftp site.

Workshop with Ed McMahon, ULI

Ed McMahon, Senior Resident Fellow at the Urban Land Institute in Washington, DC, presented a series of slides on green infrastructure and conservation development (which will be posted on the Envision Skagit website). He also discussed ULI’s Reality Check exercise and different transfer of development rights (TDR) programs across the country. He said that in all 12 regions of the country where Reality Check has been conducted, “preserve green space” was the top recommendation. For TDR to work, he said there must be demand for development beyond what is allowed by current zoning. Noting an example from Lancaster County, PA, he said that receiving areas for TDR programs can include industrial land, in addition to residential and commercial lands.

Ryan asked, what happens if a farmer sells development rights but no one wants to farm? Gary said that agriculture adapts and markets change. TDR can preserve agricultural land, not necessarily agriculture as it exists today.

Responding to a concern expressed about growth spreading from the Seattle and Vancouver, BC, areas, Mr. McMahon said that the choice was between managed and unmanaged change. Managed change tries to maximize the benefits and minimize the harm from growth.

Peggy asked about regional planning entities elsewhere in the country. Mr. McMahon said it was not unusual that they include non-governmental organizations, citing Chesapeake Bay as an example. Successful regional planning entities have some review authority over projects with regional impacts, Cape Cod and the State of Vermont being examples.

Mr. McMahon described “conservation development” as having four motivations: save the best land; increase value for land overall; provide green infrastructure; and get kids into nature. In contrast to typical zoning, which he described as “a recipe for carving up open space,” conservation development lays out the green space first, preserving the best land and leaving from 40% to 90% of the original site undeveloped. He said that communities built around farms could be more valuable than communities built around golf courses. Kirk asked whether Mr. McMahon could come back for a workshop with landowners in places that might be well-suited to conservation development. Mr. McMahon supported the effort but said he could recommend others who others might be better in that role.

Mr. McMahon briefly discussed tourism, noting that 60,000 people a day pass through Skagit County on I-5. The more that Skagit can differentiate itself as a unique destination, the more attractive it will be as a tourist destination. He noted partnerships that other places have established with national parks, citing Springdale, UT, and Zion National Park as an example.

Mr. McMahon concluded with a discussion of redeveloping strip malls. He noted that more attractive, pedestrian-friendly development can be good for business, comparing a Barnes and Noble store in a Rockville, MD, strip mall on the busiest road in the state to a second, pedestrian-friendly Barnes and Noble in Bethesda, MD, which does 20% more business per square foot. He recommended four actions to get more attractive commercial development: enforce design review standards; leverage permitting requirements; adopt design guidelines, with voluntary compliance but mandatory review; and “just ask.” Kelly Mann, guest from ULI-Seattle, said she was thrilled to be working with Envision Skagit and looked forward to the May 25 discussion of redeveloping commercial strips with Ron Sher and Beth Dwyer.

Vision Statement

Lisa reviewed edits to the vision statement in Handout #7, saying they reflected what she thought she heard from the CC discussion on May 18. It was suggested that the vision statement also integrate the concept of sustainability. CC members expressed thanks to Tim for initiating the draft statement, but agreed to postpone further discussion of it until after the CC has completed its draft recommendations.

Review of Edits to Recommendations – Discuss, Additional Edits

Open Space: Kerri summarized edits to the recommendations in Handout #6. The CC agreed that a footnote should be added, defining what is meant by a “bottom up” approach for allocating open space funds. A second footnote will be added that provides a definition of open space from the background materials. After some discussion, the CC agreed to maintain the recommendation that the County, SCOG governments and other partner jurisdictions create a more detailed, GIS-based open space plan, rather than have a more detailed plan developed for the CC’s own review. The CC agreed that the last sentence of the fourth bullet should include the following underlined addition: “When the potential for loss of critical open space to development becomes imminent, immediate public acquisition through purchase should be considered as a necessary course of action.” Kirk noted that the adopted Open Space Plan calls for an Open Space Advisory Committee to review proposed acquisitions. This has not yet happened, so he said the CC’s recommendation for it in the second bullet could be useful.

Kirk said that he is working with Grace and will also coordinate with Tim to develop transportation recommendations for the CC’s review, which could incorporate the non-motorized transportation recommendations in the handout. Tim asked that the transportation recommendations reference increased passenger rail service and identify a goal of reducing average daily trip distances.

Regional Governance: Peggy introduced Handout #8, saying that she would like to redraft the recommendations, since the Reality Check recommendation should probably come first and she was not sure whether Leadership Skagit was appropriate to include in the recommendation for a regional planning entity. Tim asked that the introduction clarify why a new entity is needed, noting that no existing organization is looking so far ahead. Grace asked that the discussion of Reality Check emphasize the goal of identifying areas of agreement. Lisa asked that CC members send any additional comments directly to Peggy.

Revenue Sharing/City Consolidation: There were no proposed edits to Handout #9, on industrial tax revenue sharing. However, Kirk said that he had asked the county's budget director and Patsy Martin, Executive Director of the Port of Skagit County, to confirm that industrial development is a net gain for local tax revenues. Cory asked for a map that could be used to recommend locations for industrial lands, which Kirk agreed to bring to the retreat. Tim said that we should also ask Patsy Martin for her recommendations.

The CC discussed Handout #10, on city consolidation, at some length but without formally approving specific amendments. Cory and John suggested the addition of school districts to the list of governments that could potentially be consolidated. Cory asked that the background summarize the consolidations that led to Sedro-Woolley and Concrete, to illustrate that government consolidation now would not be the first time. While consolidation will be controversial, he asked, "If we don't recommend it, who will?" The CC discussed including softer alternatives to recommending consolidation. Kirk suggested discussing the relationship between allocations of county population and allocations of the commercial tax base. He said that the CC could recommend that the cities at least talk about these issues. Additional language will be discussed at the CC retreat.

Envision Results

After handouts #11, 12, 13 and 14 were distributed, Josh reviewed the model results tabulated on Handout #11. The number of dwellings listed for the floodplain and CMZ includes both urban and rural areas. The number of existing development rights in different rural and resource zones includes substandard lots but does not discount for lots that might not be buildable because of critical area or other issues. If CaRD density bonus options were not allowed, the total number of development rights would drop by about 4,000. The numbers of development rights shown for different flood zones do not include urban areas. The number of development rights in the CMZ that are outside of the floodplain is 397, not the 688 shown in the table.

Kirk noted that, after consultation with city planners, the development capacity in the commercial zones of the cities—particularly Burlington and Anacortes—was reduced in the model, because initial model runs showed an abundance of "paper capacity" that the planners believed would not likely be built. Mark said that if TDR is to work, this paper capacity must be reduced, probably to about what the market might currently support, with upzones for increased capacity then conditioned on transfers of development rights. Kirk said that the county cannot increase density at Bayview because airport safety issues limit what density is allowable in adjacent areas. Burlington appears to be the best potential TDR partner for the county. Cory noted that regional coordination would be required to downzone cities and other urban areas for TDRs with the additional density required to be purchased back through density credits. Kirk and Mark said that such downzoning would not be a "taking" of property rights, since the land could still be developed, just not at the much higher density levels without the additional purchase of density credits.

Josh said that there were only a small number of factors responsible for the major divergences between scenarios: the Ecosystem Scenario's prohibition against development in the CMZ and generally reduced densities in the rural area, together with much greater density in the cities; the Development Scenario's rural villages, which were modeled to support 30,000 people; and different assumptions about conservation and restoration, which will be provided to the CC for its retreat. He said that none of the scenarios directly considered TDRs, although TDRs could be used to try to achieve what was modeled for the landscape. He said some of the most interesting results of the model for him were how much

upriver development capacity there is, how big rural villages need to be to support their population allocation, and the amount of growth assumed for Bayview, despite ecological concerns. Kirk said that he was also struck by the “paper capacity” of Anacortes and Burlington, and the challenge to provide a tax base for Mount Vernon adequate to its projected increase in population.

Lisa suggested that the CC may want to focus on elements it wants for its Preferred Future, rather than delve into details of the other scenarios. Kim noted her concern about discussing population allocations before discussing all of the key issues that lead to different population distributions. Kirk clarified that the county does receive property tax from development in cities and that ECONorthwest would be reporting on the tax consequences of urban vs. rural development. Kim noted her interest in sustaining a tax base for county services.

Other CC members also expressed concerns about identifying a preferred population allocation before determining other recommendations. Kirk and Josh said that having a “straw man” for the Preferred Future would be helpful if the CC wants to evaluate model runs at the retreat. Adjustments could be made there, but complicated programming would be difficult.

Tim said that he had researched debate on Fully Contained Communities (FCCs) by the Puget Sound Regional Council, the regional planning organization of governments for King, Snohomish, Pierce, and Kitsap counties. He noted that King County Executive Ron Sims said that, based on King County’s experience, he would not support another FCC. Kirk said that the Rural Villages in the Development Scenario were modeled at 7-8 dwelling units/acre, about twice the density of existing cities. Mark said new FCCs would start out as unincorporated Urban Growth Areas but could choose later to incorporate as cities.

Jim said he thought future residents should decide if they want new rural villages. Gus said he did not think FCCs should be taken off the table. Cory said that, putting the FCC issue aside, he supported compact cities. Grace suggested a population allocation of 65% urban (reduced because it would not include floodplain redevelopment in Burlington), 10% rural village, and 25% rural (considering the last allocation not necessarily desirable but perhaps inevitable). Kim noted that the rural villages were mostly along the I-5 corridor, which Robert Lang predicted would fill up. She said that if FCCs could follow conservation development principles they might be needed to meet population demand. Kerri noted that Glenhaven, just north of Alger in Whatcom County, was already growing and that it would be good to partner with Whatcom County to coordinate that growth.

Kirk suggested creating two “straw men” proposals for the retreat, one that relies on densifying the urban areas and another that includes rural villages. Lisa said she would e-mail the CC to poll members on their views about key issues for a Preferred Future, including urban and rural development in the floodplain/CMZ, rural villages, and the amount of density in urban areas.

Next Steps/Next Meeting

Kirk said that the retreat would be all day on both May 13 and 14, with a potluck dinner at his house after the first day.

Lisa noted that Nate and Ryan had had to leave early and had told her they did not want to “let the CC down” by their absence. CC members supported sending a message to both expressing understanding for their work commitments and appreciation for their continued participation.

Lisa said that the previously scheduled CC public meeting on May 23 would be moved to June and that a one-and-half to two-hour meeting with mayors and county commissioners would be added for the week of Memorial Day. She will send out an updated schedule soon.

4:35 Adjourn