

# Envision Skagit looks to county's future

BY KIMBERLY JACOBSON  
*American staff writer*

Protecting farmland, maintaining healthy ecosystems and keeping Skagit County's small-town environment were some of the top things Anacortes residents want to retain as the county plans for future population growth.

Envision Skagit 2060 citizen committee members are getting community input from around the county, including at an Anacortes meeting Feb. 16.

The Envision Skagit 2060 project seeks to develop and implement a broadly supported, 50-year plan to protect the Skagit and Samish river watersheds' many environmental values, maintain highly productive natural resource industries, and accommodate population growth in livable, walkable and economically vibrant communities.

At last month's meeting, residents answered three questions: (1) What do you most value about Skagit County that needs to be retained over time? (2) What do we need to work harder on in the future that

*See Skagit, page A6*

## Skagit

*Continued from page A1*

would improve the quality of life for Skagit County residents? (3) How/where should Skagit County accommodate 50 years projected population growth?

Citizen committee member Peggy Flynn said she and fellow member Cory Ertel, both Anacortes residents, are transplants to the city. They chose Anacortes because of the small-town quality of life.

"We like going out and running into our neighbors and friends at the grocery store, hardware store and restaurants," Flynn said.

But a lot of people are projected to move to the county.

"That's the reason we're going to be talking about Envision Skagit," she said.

The county's population has more than doubled since 1960, from 51,000 to

120,000. It is projected to increase another 100,000 by 2060.

Envision Skagit 2060 is a partnership among Skagit County and numerous local and regional organizations, including conservation groups, tribes, local farmers and foresters, cities, economic development interests and universities. It is funded with a grant from the Environmental Protection Agency with substantial in-kind contributions from Skagit County and its partners.

Ertel said the citizen committee is tasked with listening to residents and then making recommendations where the county can fit 100,000 people in the next 50 years.

Skagit County Commissioner Ron Wesen said the project has been going for nearly two years. The 12-member citizens committee has met many times over the past months. He said the county is a unique area.

"We have to make sure

the things we value we try to protect," he said.

Skagit County has an active agriculture community, relatively strong salmon runs, a large amount of forest land, marine shoreline, four cities, four towns and four tribes on three reservations, Kirk Johnson, project manager for Envision Skagit, told residents at the meeting.

"We don't know the future but the projections are that there will be more population growth in part because of what is so unique and special about this place," he said. "There are natural treasures we want to hang on to."

By working together and planning, Johnson said the county has a better chance to shape its future. Besides population, the county has to look at other services people need like jobs, transportation, schools, services, businesses, health care and recreation.

Envision Skagit 2060 will ultimately recommend

changes to Skagit County's and other jurisdictions' plans and policies, addressing: land-use planning, community and economic development, environmental protection and natural resource conservation.

Residents at the Anacortes meeting last month were asked to answer three questions. At the end of the brainstorming session they were each given nine dots to prioritize the ideas.

What do you most value about Skagit County that needs to be retained over time?

The top responses were farmland, access to natural environment/waterfront, small-town environment, healthy ecosystems, drinking water/aquifers and access to locally grown food/enabling small, local growers to survive.

Other answers included marine recreation, diverse natural habitats/corridors, quality school systems, engaged citizenry, air quality, high quality health care

and handicapped accessibility.

What do we need to work harder on in the future that would improve the quality of life for Skagit County residents?

The top responses were more efficient mass transit, more comprehensive pedestrian-friendly network, less consumptive/more energy efficient, more affordable housing, zoning for more variety of housing options/better environmentally friendly housing, more diverse mixed income neighborhoods, encourage low impact development, planning for climate change/ecological impact and youth voice needed in process.

Other answers included more cooperation between cities, strengthen local retail economy, regional library system, maximize services to seniors, bike-friendly developments, green zones/open space, town squares, continuing care residences for seniors, greater support of small business initia-

tives and encouraging small farms in valley.

How/where should Skagit County accommodate 50 years projected population growth?

The top responses were build up rather than out (density), within urban growth areas only, local hamlets/"rural villages," mixed use residential/commercial developments, consider carrying capacity of Skagit County, avoid encroachment of farmland, public transportation/infrastructure and keep future growth out of the flood plain and avoid increasing density in flood plain.

Others answers included requiring developers to provide infrastructure mitigation, allowing some development in the foothills to save farmland, maintaining affordable housing for diverse population/in diverse places and controlling traffic volumes from primary to secondary roads.

Visit [www.skagitcounty.net/envisionskagit](http://www.skagitcounty.net/envisionskagit).