

# Leaders look to collaborate to make growth plan work

By KATE MARTIN  
Staff Writer

BURLINGTON — Mayors, commissioners and other elected officials say there are opportunities to work together in a proposed 50-year plan for county growth.

Doing nothing will only take a huge and costly toll on the county's future, they say.

"We agree that it would be good for our children to live here and for them to work where they live," said Port of Skagit County Commissioner Kevin Ware during a meeting Thursday to discuss the plan. "We are going to have to make this decision for the benefit of our children that is, without a doubt, going to have an adverse impact on somebody today."

During Thursday's meeting, elected officials from all walks of local government discussed ways to collectively put some of the plan, called Envision Skagit 2060, into action. The plan calls for cities and the county to share tax revenue, double the area for industrial development, and encourages 90 percent of new residents to live in cities instead of the county.

In 50 years, Skagit County could have 100,000 more residents.

One idea, called an "industrial tax basket," would create a consolidated industrial area from which all cities and governments could draw tax revenue.

Skagit County Commissioner Ron Wesen said if the region does not plan to set that land aside now, "you won't get that for the future."

"If you don't have that (zoning) available, they (businesses) are going to move on," Wesen said. "I don't think it should be owned by government. It should be privately owned."

A 12-person citizen committee crafted the long-term growth plan over the course of several months.

See **GROWTH**, Page A9

## Growth

Continued from Page A1

The committee toured farms, businesses and city centers throughout Skagit County.

Arguably the most unpopular suggestion that came out of the Envision Skagit 2060 process was to merge Mount Vernon and Burlington into one city. While several people said that would never happen, the concept of sharing city services has merit, said Port of Anacortes Commissioner Keith Rubin.

"I see many opportunities for consolidation of government services," Rubin said. "I think we'll see that more and more as time goes on, because our resources are precious and we can't afford to duplicate efforts."

Still, some members of the crowd were skeptical of the plan. Many had voiced their opposition to the project during a

Wednesday night meeting because of its cost. Envision Skagit 2060 was paid for with two federal grants totaling \$1.4 million. Local governments have supplemented that amount with \$750,000.

Tony Tomasino of Sedro-Woolley said instead of creating a centralized industrial zone, the cities should refurbish their urban areas to attract business.

"If you really want to have large industry, you are going to have to get past the ecological groups," Tomasino said. "They are fighting over a railroad track right now. Are you kidding me?"

Elected officials were asked to return to their councils and commissions to discuss the plan. They will return at the end of May for another regional collaboration meeting.

■ Kate Martin can be reached at 360-416-2145 or [kmartin@skagitpublishing.com](mailto:kmartin@skagitpublishing.com). Follow her on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/gov\\_svh](http://www.twitter.com/gov_svh).