

2016 Comprehensive Plan Update Planning Commission Public Workshop - Housing Element, February 17, 2015

Question key for all groups:

1. What can Skagit County do to “preserve, conserve, and enhance the existing housing stock” in its rural communities and neighborhoods, consistent with Goal B of the Comp Plan’s Housing Element?
2. Given a trend of smaller household sizes and an aging population, what can the County and cities do to promote housing variety for the current and next generation?
3. What are the appropriate and respective roles of the private sector – which finances and builds most of the housing in Skagit County – and the public sector – which establishes the policy and regulatory framework for housing development – in meeting current and future housing needs?
4. The County allocates growth over the 2016-2036 planning period in consultation with cities. The County is responsible for housing in unincorporated UGAs and especially rural areas where there is a larger share of single family and manufactured housing presently. The County is required under the GMA to limit residential growth and densities in the rural area, while the cities are encouraged to accommodate population growth and have greater leeway to encourage multi-family housing and higher residential densities. The County provides human services countywide. **There is a gap in the supply of housing affordable to a range of household incomes in the County. What should be the County’s role? What should be the cities’ role?**
5. As one of the more prominent employment sectors in Skagit County, agriculture generates a need for farmworker housing. While the agricultural jobs are largely in the rural county, the location of services and infrastructure tends to be in the cities. What should be the County’s role? What should be the cities’ role? Where should farmworker housing be located?

Group Answers

Group One (Facilitator: Paul Schissler)

Question One: What can the county do to preserve, conserve and enhance the existing housing stock?

- a. Examine rules and regulations that apply to existing platted rural lots in Blanchard, Edison, Alger, etc.
- b. Examine regulations and impact fees.
- c. Help create sewer systems for properties with failing septic systems.
- d. Continue to stand and fight for the land owners on water issues.

Question Two: given the trend toward smaller housing sizes and aging population, what can the County and cities do to promote housing variety?

- a. Create affordable senior housing.
- b. Create affordable high-density housing in downtown communities for small families, 1-2 persons.

- c. High density, multi-family is inappropriate in rural areas.
- d. Look at current zoning for multi-family with commercial on the main floor. Not all locations can currently support commercial uses. Flex-space or live-work designs could allow future commercial uses but residential in initial years.

Question Three: What are appropriate roles of the private sector and public sector in meeting current/future housing needs?

- a. Public employees of cities and counties should follow the existing GMA plan.
- b. Consistent answers for cities and counties relating to building, properties, etc.; systematic approach.
- c. Lessen regulations and costs for developing land and properties

Question Four: what can the County and the cities do to address the gap in the supply of affordable housing?

- a. Reduce regulations when appropriate.

Question Five: What should be County's and cities' roles in farmworker housing; where should it be located?

- a. Inspire some form of industrial or modular production of homes, whether public or private sector. "Build it and they will come."
- b. Publically support affordable housing for the farming community in a central location.
- c. The county needs to encourage the cities to help with agricultural affordable housing, as payroll from agriculture goes to the cities and supports services.

Group Two (Facilitator: Kirk Johnson)

Question One – What can the county do to preserve, conserve and enhance the existing housing stock?

- a. Community Services – provide assistance to low-income homeowners.
 - o Is this the County's role?
- b. Broker information on emergency finance options, education and outreach, planning.
- c. Help maintain people in their own homes.
- d. Fund or promote services to homeowners.
- e. Senior property tax exemption.
- f. Research: What do we spend on housing? How much should we spend?
- g. How are we going to find, attract and keep workers in the building industry? Incentivize?
- h. Economic development, private or public sector?
- i. Rebuild vs new building?
 - o What can we do differently?

- Allow what is there to stay.
- Code compliance has a role.
- j. Changes in livability (e.g. increased train traffic through communities).
 - How can the County maintain community livability?
 - How do environmental changes affect housing values?
- k. Buildable lands analysis.
 - Cities required to do them, but not counties.
 - What's realistic in the rural county? Do we really know?
 - Water uncertainties – how long will this impact the county?

Question Two: given the trend toward smaller housing sizes and aging population, what can the County and cities do to promote housing variety?

- a. How good are the projections?
- b. Aging. Where are you going to be in 20 years? Two factors of aging – those already here and those retiring here.
- c. How do you project a housing market?
- d. How do you know exactly where they'll go or how they want to live?
 - Do the trends hold true?
- e. Whether projections are right or not, there's just not much inventory. Lack of inventory for those who want urban living.
- f. Being near services matters.
 - Progressive assisted living;
 - Create community and amenities for older groups – no matter where they are;
 - There are some facilities – how do you connect people to them, especially in the rural areas?

Question Three: What are appropriate roles of the private sector and public sector in meeting current/future housing needs?

- a. How do you allocate density? Spread it out where appropriate, e.g. in cities.
- b. Others play a role too, e.g. Habitat for Humanity.
- c. Need a range of affordable types, single-family, multi-family.
- d. How do you pay for it?
 - How have others done it, e.g., Bellingham, others?

Question Four: No response.

Question Five: What should be County's and the cities' roles in farmworker housing; where should it be located?

- a. Where? Where the infrastructure is, where they spend the money and support the economy.
- b. There are language and ethnicity issues but need to get beyond it.
- c. If we want farming here we need to figure it out.
- d. Transportation to and from farms if living in the cities?
 - o Not a huge problem – farms not too far, could create a bus system.
- e. Quality housing, not “tenement” type.
- f. Why do we look at farmworker housing as different than other affordable housing?
- g. How do you deal with the seasonal aspect?
- h. Why aren't we getting farmworker housing in the cities now? Do we worry about traffic? Different work schedules, disaggregated traffic?
- i. A lot of opportunities for affordable housing, but may not be just farmworkers living there.
- j. Can coordinate seasonal farm work by season. Supply/demand of work? Are people leaving area completely?
- k. What about building a farmworker housing area out in the county?
 - o Can't do it.
- l. Temporary housing on farms in rural area? Does county zoning allow? Does county want this?
- m. Need cost effective solutions that work for farmers and for the industry.

Group Three (Facilitator: Gary Christensen)

Question One: What can the county do to preserve, conserve and enhance the existing housing stock?

- a. Relocate/move structures.
- b. Weatherization, home maintenance programs. Is there additional funding for these programs?
- c. Repurpose and recycle old “housing stock.”
- d. Change codes to allow for multi-family homes in the county. Duplexes, etc.

Question Two: given the trend toward smaller housing sizes and aging population, what can the County and cities do to promote housing variety?

- a. Micro units for seniors, disabled, singles; is there a monetary incentive?
- b. Relax codes on parking.
- c. Building residential over commercial.
- d. Require for land divisions that a portion of the lots are for affordable homes.
- e. Combining funds.
- f. REET, Real Estate Excise Tax – utilize this for affordable housing.

Question Three: What are appropriate roles of the private sector and public sector in meeting current/future housing needs?

- a. Partnerships between private sector and local government.
- b. Create a preference for publicly owned lands (to consider their use for housing) before surplus.
- c. Review impact fees and how they are collected.

Question Four: what can the County and the cities do to address the gap in the supply of affordable housing?

- a. Consider more flexibility for affordable housing in rural areas.

Question Five: What should be County's and cities' roles in farmworker housing; where should it be located?

- a. Housing in cities and flexibility in rural areas.
- b. Look at codes for seasonal housing.
- c. Encourage living wage jobs.

Group Four (Facilitator: Bob Hicks)

Question 1: What can the County do to preserve, conserve and enhance the existing housing stock?

- a. Existing vs creating new.
- b. Don't put industries, businesses next to residences that would drive down property values (Marijuana, cell phone towers).
- c. Rural housing is hindered by lack of water availability and bureaucracy.
- d. Zoning, match single family vs multi-family.
- e. Investigate, encourage County expertise in historic preservation.
- f. Provide help for old houses.
- g. Investigate connections medium incomes vs foreclosures.
- h. Gather better data.
- i. Develop language, process.
- j. Follow building codes.
- k. Don't let sheathing touch ground.

Question 2: given the trend toward smaller housing sizes and aging population, what can the County and cities do to promote housing variety?

- a. All kinds of housing.
- b. Need dial-a-ride, supportive services.
- c. How much available land is there for new multi-family housing.
- d. Public land – can it be surplus for housing purposes?

- e. Student loan debt.
- f. Are there tax breaks for new higher-wage jobs?
- g. Over a lifetime people experience different housing needs; from small apartments for the newly independent, to small homes for families, to bigger homes, back to smaller living spaces for the aging population.
- h. Cost to rent is going up, can't afford to buy a home.
- i. Incentive for landlords to support recent graduates (working poor).

Question 3: What are appropriate roles of the private sector and public sector in meeting current/future housing needs?

- a. Real accurate information.
- b. Regulations not onerous.
- c. Clearly written regulations.
- d. Allow some areas to build up with mixed uses.
- e. County can connect projects and support to builders.
- f. Support to hire locally.

Question 4: what can the County and the cities due to address the gap in the supply of affordable housing?

- a. Rural areas are limited by not being able to have multi-family housing and sewers.
- b. Concern about hazardous landfills in aquifer 2.
- c. Concern that GMA drives people to live in city.
- d. An explanation and justification of why impact fees are so high.
- e. Focus on economic vitality to raise job opportunities and wages.

Question Five: What should be County's and cities' roles in farmworker housing; where should it be located?

- a. Don't put farmworker housing in the floodplain.
- b. The County and cities can identify developable land for farmworker housing .

Group Five (Facilitator: Dale Pernula)

Question 1: What can the county do to preserve, conserve and enhance the existing housing stock?

- a. Partnering with cities.
- b. Incentives, tax breaks.
- c. Increase densities.
- d. Rehabilitate existing housing.

- e. Create high densities in commercial districts.
- f. Allow mixed use.
- g. Rural Villages.

Question Two: given the trend toward smaller housing sizes and aging population, what can the County and cities do to promote housing variety?

- a. Incentives to create ADUs.
- b. Overlays to create more density in areas with existing homes.

Question 3: No response.

Question Four: what can the County and the cities do to address the gap in the supply of affordable housing?

- a. Redevelopment of commercial properties to mixed use, residential/commercial.

Question Five: What should be County's and cities' roles in farmworker housing; where should it be located?

- a. Much higher density for season farm workers.

Group Six (Facilitator: Betsy Stevenson)

Question 1: What can the County do to preserve, conserve and enhance the existing housing stock?

- a. Housing Stock.
 - o Big demand.
 - Lack of affordability.
 - County support.
- b. Historic.
 - o Grants and incentives to improve: President Hotel, Wilson Hotel (25 units with retail; historical landmark); opportunity for the Eagles Hall.
- c. Single room occupancy dwelling, e.g. New York.
- d. Water.
 - o PUD.
- e. Ag properties with room and water.
- f. Neighborhood code adjustments, location of dwellings and garages.
- g. Mixed use into residential.
- h. Higher density.
- i. Perpetual affordability - subsidy remains with the home.

- j. Market pressure is believed to drive down preservation.

Question Two: given the trend toward smaller housing sizes and aging population, what can the County and cities do promote housing variety?

- a. Aging population needs:
 - o Rentals, ADU (code currently: for family or rent to someone else).
- b. Tax credit units:
 - o Currently no full time students receive. Younger group should be allowed to qualify

Question Three: What are appropriate roles of the private sector and public sector in meeting current/future housing needs?

- a. Private & public partnership: Wilson Hotel project.
- b. Parking requirements: Adjustments, side streets?
- c. Public can help provide land and infrastructure; Grants to build.
- d. Housing levy for affordability.
- e. Other incentives:
 - o Lower fees: a percentage of development may qualify.

Question Four: what can the County and the cities do to address the gap in the supply of affordable housing?

- a. County role:
 - o PUDs.
 - o Rural Villages.
- b. City role:
 - o Mixed use: retail & housing.
 - o Smaller lots.
 - o Conditional use triplexes.
- c. Revisit 20% 80% rural to urban target.

Question Five Question Five: What should be County's and cities' roles in farmworker housing; where should it be located?

- a. Ag workers housing: necessary to maintain the industry.
- b. Should it be provided on farmland or in cities?
- c. Transportation considerations.
- d. Use of former seasonal worker lots for new farmworker housing.