



# CITY OF SUMAS

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# Memo

**To:** The Honorable Mayor and Sumas City Council  
**From:** Carson Cortez, City Planner  
**Date:** September 20, 2024  
**Re:** Sumas Proposed Population and Employment Proposal

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On April 29, Whatcom County released their latest version of their Population and Employment Projections report that was developed for Whatcom County by SCJ Alliance, a group contracted by Whatcom County and the cities to help with organizing the coordinated Comprehensive Plan update process. The report described the population and employment projections for the County that were made by the Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM).

OFM provided three possible projections for how much the County of Whatcom could grow in population and employment over the next 20 years. These three possible projections identified a range that the county could be expected to grow by. The first is the low projection. This projection identifies the least amount that Whatcom County could grow by over the next 20 years. The next is the medium projection. This represents OFM's best guess as to how much the County could grow by and has generally been accurate in past Comprehensive Plan update cycles. The final is the high projection, which represents the maximum amount that the County is expected to grow by.

Upon receiving the three population and employment projections from OFM, SCJ Alliance went through the initial process of allocating the projections between the 7 Whatcom cities, as well as unincorporated Whatcom County. In order to decide what percentage of the County's total projection growth each jurisdiction should reach; they used past percentages of the total County population that each jurisdiction has had over the past 10 years. For context, Sumas was determined to have occupied roughly 1.2% of the County's total population. Below are the low, medium, and high population projections that SCJ Alliance determined that Sumas could look to grow over the next 20 years, using the aforementioned 1.2% allocation:

- Low: 468
- Med: 697
- High: 1,052

Keep in mind that this number is only based on OFM's population projections and does not account for local conditions which may affect the town's growth.

As part of the County's overall coordinated Comprehensive Plan update with all the cities, they and SCJ Alliance are going through the process of developing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to identify any impacts to the environment that this Comprehensive Plan process may have. As part of the EIS, the County and SCJ Alliance will establish 4 potential alternatives for what the conclusion of the Comprehensive Plan could look like. The first is the no-action alternative, required for identifying what would happen if nothing changed. After the no-action are two alternatives that are based on the medium and high population and employment projections allocated to the County by OFM. The final alternative, called alternative 2, is developed using proposed population and employment projections developed by the individual jurisdictions based on how much growth each city expects that they will have in 20 years.

In order to participate in this EIS process, the City of Sumas needs to develop our own proposal for how much growth we are okay with planning for over the next 20 years. Initially, I came up with a preliminary number using the size of the proposed UGAs as a baseline. **I initially project that if we were to annex all of the UGA areas that we are proposing, then we could see an increase in our population of about 1,000 people and 200 jobs over the next 20 years.** This initial projection of 1,000 new residents is very close to SCJ Alliance's projection for Sumas of 1,052 people using OFM's countywide projections. This is very similar to almost every other jurisdiction in the County who are also aligning with SCJ Alliance's high projection.

By the end of October, the City needs to decide on how much population and employment we are willing to grow by over the next 20 years. In order to achieve this goal, conversations regarding this topic have to begin at the City Council level as soon as possible. On September 16, the Sumas Planning Commission reviewed the proposal and recommended approval. They noted that they were for it as long as it was framed under the context of preparing for the worst-case scenario and hoping for a better one.