

Proposed by: _____
Introduction date: _____

RESOLUTION NO. _____

RESOLUTION REGARDING ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE FROM THE COUNTY COUNCIL
TO THE EXECUTIVE AND PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES ON THE
POPULATION, HOUSING AND EMPLOYMENT ALLOCATIONS

WHEREAS, the Growth Management Act (GMA) requires Whatcom County and the cities to review and, if needed, update their respective comprehensive; and

WHEREAS, the GMA requires county and city comprehensive plans to be coordinated and consistent; and

WHEREAS, the GMA states that urban growth areas (UGAs) must be revised to accommodate the urban growth projected to occur in the succeeding 20-year planning period that extends through 2045(RCW 36.70A.130); and

WHEREAS, population, housing, and employment allocations are a critical component in the comprehensive plan update and UGA review process; and

WHEREAS, Countywide Planning Policies encourage placing a larger share population growth and housing allocations in Bellingham and urban areas, and less in rural areas; and

WHEREAS the GMA encourages placing a larger share population growth and housing allocations in urban areas, and less in rural areas; and

WHEREAS, the County and cities' climate action and sustainability goals include minimizing vehicle trips from rural areas to urban areas; and

WHEREAS, Transit Oriented Development is key to these climate action and sustainability goals include minimizing vehicle trips from rural areas to urban areas; and

WHEREAS, Transit Oriented Development is more practical when housing and employment growth is concentrated in urban areas; and

WHEREAS, through a separate resolution, titled "Non-Binding Multi-Jurisdictional Resolution Regarding Population, Housing and Employment Allocations," the County Council will approve preliminary allocations for initial review of urban growth areas by the County and cities; and

WHEREAS, while final decisions on population, housing, and employment allocations will not be made until the next comprehensive plan is adopted, it is important for the County and cities to agree upon preliminary allocations in order to coordinate transportation modeling, capital facility planning, environmental review, and UGA recommendations; and WHEREAS, the final population and employment allocations may affect how accurately the cities and County plan for investing substantial amounts of capital into infrastructure needed for achieving housing and employment growth; and

WHEREAS, the preliminary population, housing, and employment growth allocations shown in Exhibit A to the “Non-Binding Multi-Jurisdictional Resolution” plan for population growth above 19% greater the State Office of Financial Management’s (OFM’s) most likely projection for growth through 2045; and

WHEREAS, higher city and UGA population projections will allow for increased housing supply and densities to help address our affordable housing needs, they also increase capacity and feasibility for Transit Oriented Development, but may direct capital facility planning and potential capital facilities investments to areas that may not be developed within the 20-year planning period; and

WHEREAS, population and employment proposals in Exhibit A to the “Non-Binding Multi-Jurisdictional Resolution” include levels above the medium growth projections in some UGAs not adjacent to major projected employment areas, such as Columbia Valley, providing additional employment capacity in such UGAs as Columbia Valley may also reduce vehicle trips from such areas to other major employment centers; and

WHEREAS, the County’s current land use policies may lead to piecemeal development in unincorporated areas that cities may seek to annex in the future, making future annexations more difficult and housing even more expensive;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Whatcom County Council acknowledges that a range of population, housing, and employment allocations are being studied in the environmental impact statement and UGA review process and the final UGA growth allocations may be different than set forth in Exhibit A to the “Non-Binding Multi-Jurisdictional Resolution”.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED the Whatcom County Council requests that as part of the development of the 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update, the Executive and Whatcom County Planning and Development Services:

- 1) Coordinate with the cities and County Council to recommend tools for improving development potential in municipal unincorporated UGAs (e.g., annexation incentives) where cities do not extend public sewer and water prior to annexation. Furthermore, consider if policies such as the following might address those concerns:

- (a) Modifying County zoning in existing and city-proposed Urban Growth Areas to allow a maximum of one dwelling/20 acres.
 - (b) Modifying County zoning in existing and city-proposed Urban Growth Area Reserves to allow a maximum of one dwelling/20 acres.
 - (c) Encourage the cities to develop or review future land use designations that would take effect in the UGAs upon annexation.
 - (d) Encourage alternative funding mechanisms such as impact fees and other mechanisms to pay for infrastructure needs in the UGAs to enable cities and other urban service providers more feasible means to extend these services into municipal unincorporated UGAs.
- 2) Present options and an analysis of the pros and cons of reducing or mitigating potential population growth impacts to the County's rural and resource lands.
 - 3) Encourage increasing transit from outlying small cities and rural areas into major employment areas to reduce VMT's.
 - 4) Study street standards in municipal UGA and UGA reserves to align bicycle, pedestrian, and mobility infrastructure to connect with similar adjacent municipal infrastructure.
 - 5) Provide County Council information on how employment projections in Exhibit A to the "Non-Binding Multi-Jurisdictional Resolution" for rural and rural resource areas, and for UGAs not associated with incorporated cities, align with planned commercial and industrial land capacity and zoning in those areas.
 - 6) Present options to County Council to discourage growth in vulnerable floodplains and coastal areas projected to experience sea level rise and to encourage growth in safer locations
 - 7) Establish and publish goals and metrics to expedite and reduce the cost of permitting
 - 8) Develop a work program to conduct a full code simplification process
 - 9) Establish a policy to ensure that when permit applicants receive responses from Planning and Development Services all county requests must be justified by citing o a specific and publicly accessible county code or state or federal law or regulation.
 - 10) Update the County Council on discussion between the County, the City of Bellingham, City of Ferndale, and other cities that work toward addressing these issues.

APPROVED this _____ day of _____ 2025.

ATTEST

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON

Cathy Halka, Clerk of the Council

Kaylee Galloway, Council Chair

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

Civil Deputy Prosecutor