



## Whatcom Chapter

# DO NOT EXPAND THE BELLINGHAM URBAN GROWTH AREA BOUNDARIES

Eric Hirst  
Futurewise Whatcom  
1932 Rhododendron Way  
Bellingham, WA 98229  
656-6690 [EricHirst@comcast.net](mailto:EricHirst@comcast.net)

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Bellingham City Council  
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On behalf of the Whatcom County chapter of Futurewise, thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important issue. We believe there is no need to expand the UGA at all; Bellingham's existing boundaries are sufficient to accommodate planned population growth. Therefore, we very much agree with and support Mayor Dan Pike's proposed resolution on the Bellingham UGA. As *The Bellingham Herald's* editorial (1/20/2008) put it: "Bellingham does not need to grow beyond its current growth boundaries to create room for more housing. There are plenty of places to build in the city. For decades now, citizens have said they don't want Bellingham to turn into a sprawling community like so many other places in our region."

Futurewise is a statewide nonprofit group, headquartered in Seattle, which focuses on Smart Growth. The Futurewise mission is to promote healthy communities and cities while protecting farmland, forests, and shorelines for this and future generations. Smart Growth emphasizes land-use patterns that accommodate increasing population in ways that benefit current and future residents. Such patterns focus development inside existing cities, where infrastructure already exists, minimizing the cost to taxpayers for these expensive capital investments. Such infill can provide a diversity of housing and transportation options within cities and protect rural areas.

Futurewise Whatcom strongly believes that Bellingham can and should grow within its existing limits for several reasons:

- Accommodating population growth is more a policy issue than one of analysis. Regardless of what any land-supply analysis says,<sup>1</sup> the key issue is whether we want to grow responsibly or

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<sup>1</sup> Our August 4, 2007 statement before the Whatcom County Council included an appendix that offered several technical comments on the (flawed, in our view) assumptions used in the Bellingham land-supply analysis related to inflated safety factor, overestimate of land needed for parks, and use of minimum densities in the existing UGA.

Futurewise Whatcom Steering Committee  
Rick Dubrow, Lynnea Flarry, Eric Hirst, Michael Lilliquist,  
Charlie Maliszewski, Tris Shirley, Dan Warner  
[whatcom@futurewise.org](mailto:whatcom@futurewise.org) [futurewise.org/whatcom](http://futurewise.org/whatcom)

sprawl across the county. We are delighted that the County Council has the long-term vision to require cities to create compact, livable communities, and we urge the Bellingham City Council to do likewise. Otherwise, we would soon be living in BellingFern and then a few years later in BellFernLyn. Do our citizens really want to live in a never-ending suburb?

- Almost all the candidates for county and city office in last fall's election emphasized their commitment to maintaining the quality of our wonderful lifestyle. In order to meet that commitment, we must protect our declining stock of farmlands, forests, parks, wildlife habitat, and open space. The only way to protect and preserve our rural areas is to limit the outward expansion of our cities.
- Society must soon respond to resource scarcity—global climate change, peak oil, and water quality and quantity, among others. In Washington, 45% of total greenhouse gas emissions is from transportation (a much higher percentage than for the nation as a whole). This high percentage emphasizes the long-term consequences of our land-use decisions. We must act now to stop sprawl and to concentrate development inside existing urban boundaries. This concentration of development is likely the best, perhaps the only, way to reduce motor vehicle use and the associated carbon emissions.
- Expanding UGA boundaries would encourage leapfrog development and lead to further fragmentation of Whatcom County farmland by implicitly encouraging urban-type developments in rural areas, both residential and commercial.
- Expanding the Bellingham UGA would *discourage* development in downtown Bellingham, the opposite of what we want. How will we create the vibrant waterfront on the GP site if we allow (even encourage) development in outlying areas?

In addition to supporting the Mayor's proposed resolution, we also favor the one introduced by Council Member Weiss. We hope Bellingham will focus on high-quality infill and redevelopment opportunities within our existing boundaries. We strongly favor the proposal to share some of the "socially-created economic value [of increased density] with the affected neighborhoods and community at large."

In summary, Futurewise Whatcom believes that Bellingham can accommodate all its planned growth within its current limits. Although we would prefer no expansion of the UGA, we respect and applaud the County Council for developing a more realistic proposal than the Bellingham one. If time permits, we urge the City and County to work together on a plan that calls for no expansion of the UGA and, therefore, best serves the long-run interests of our citizens.

If we are to maintain the many wonderful features of our natural and built environments, we must *manage* growth responsibly. We hope you will lead Bellingham and Whatcom County towards a long-term sustainable future that benefits citizens rather than special interests.