

GROWTH MANAGEMENT ACT STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

October 19th, 2016
Burlington City Council Chambers
Burlington, WA

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mayor Joan Cromley, Town of Hamilton, Chair; Commissioner Ken Dahlstedt, Skagit County, Vice-Chair; Mayor Jill Boudreau, City of Mount Vernon; Mayor Laurie Gere, City of Anacortes; Mayor Ramon Hayes, Town of La Conner; Commissioner Lisa Janicki, Skagit County; Mayor Steve Sexton, City of Burlington; Mayor Keith Wagoner, City of Sedro-Woolley; Commissioner Ron Wesen, Skagit County.

1. Roll Call: The meeting of the Growth Management Act Steering Committee (GMASC) was called to order at 2:30 p.m. Roll was taken with a quorum present.
2. Approval of August 17th, 2016 GMASC Meeting Minutes: Mayor Gere moved approval of meeting minutes from the August 17th, 2016 GMASC meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Wesen. The motion carried unanimously.
3. Skagit County Docket Proposal Received regarding Avalon Fully Contained Community
 - a. Background on 2002 Framework Agreement, County-wide Planning Policies, Population and Employment Allocations, and Urban Growth Areas: Kevin Murphy, Executive Director of the Skagit Council of Governments, provided an overview of the 2002 Framework Agreement signed by member jurisdictions in Skagit County. Mr. Murphy gave background information about Washington state's Growth Management Act, the role of establishing a county-wide framework for planning, and described the purview of the GMASC in establishing county-wide planning policies, population and employment allocations, and the establishment of urban growth areas and their modifications. Past GMASC actions in 2014 and 2015 were described with regard to these responsibilities. Mr. Murphy noted that the three cities in Skagit County that completed their comprehensive plans earlier this year indicated that there is enough buildable lands within their municipal urban growth areas to accommodate their 2036 population allocations.

Mayor Boudreau asked if Skagit County jurisdictions need to select a population forecast within the range provided by Washington state's Office of Financial Management (OFM). Mr. Murphy responded that the adopted forecast does have to fall within the low to high range provided by OFM. The adopted, twenty-year forecast for Skagit County is near the medium range population projection provided by OFM, a total county-wide population of approximately 155,000 by 2036.
 - b. Skagit County Board of Commissioners Memo regarding Avalon Fully Contained Community Proposal: Dale Pernula, Planning Director for Skagit County, presented a memo from the Board of County Commissioners to the GMASC describing the Avalon Fully Contained Community (Avalon FCC) proposal and asking the following question of the GMASC:

Is the GMASC willing at this time to consider revisiting the 20-year population forecast and allocations, and the policy framework they are based on, to allow for fully contained communities in Skagit County?

A process is proposed in the memo for considering the question including presentations and discussion at the October 19th meeting, a recommendation from the Growth Management Act Technical Advisory Committee following the October meeting, and another GMASC meeting later in 2016 to discuss and take action on the question.

- c. Avalon Proposal Memo, Appendices and Presentation: Bob Carmichael, on behalf of Skagit Partners, LLC which has proposed the Avalon FCC, delivered a presentation on the proposal. Mr. Carmichael suggested that the potential impacts of Avalon should be investigated through a non-project action Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), which is proposed as an option in the County's memo. The Growth Management Act says that counties may establish a process for creating an FCC and the Washington Administrative Code indicates that counties may reserve population for new FCCs. Mr. Carmichael asked that Skagit County study this proposal, through an EIS, before deciding whether or not FCCs are desired for Skagit County.

Mr. Carmichael provided an overview of the Avalon FCC proposal including the vision for the project, existing site conditions, nearby infrastructure and the anticipated benefits the project would bring to Skagit County. A population allocation of 8,500 is being sought for the Avalon FCC to be reserved from the 20-year county-wide population forecast, with an accompanying rise of 8,500 in the county-wide population forecast. Affordable housing is a requirement of GMA and would be included in the Avalon FCC. Mr. Carmichael noted that he expects the project would be tax-revenue-positive and a destination-caliber community. Jon Peterson, President of Peterson Economics, was introduced by Mr. Carmichael to describe the economic analysis conducted for the Avalon FCC.

Mr. Peterson first did an economic analysis for this project in 2008 and updated the analysis this year. Retirement-oriented communities, which the Avalon FCC would be, have different impacts than standard subdivisions having fewer impacts, including those to school districts, because few if any children are located in the community. Avalon FCC would have a strong potential to attract buyers from Seattle in the 45–55 age range. Housing would be relatively “affordable” after selling a home in Seattle and purchasing at a lower price point at Avalon FCC. Some local buyers from Skagit County, Whatcom County and buyers from British Columbia should be expected as well.

Mr. Peterson noted that 800–1000 construction jobs are anticipated to be created during a 10–12 year period as Avalon FCC is being developed. Most of these jobs likely would be located in Sedro-Woolley, Burlington and Mount Vernon. This development would put Skagit County “on the map” as a retirement destination, and more retirement-oriented communities should be expected in the future, as has occurred around Bend, Oregon.

Mayor Cromley asked if affordable housing would be included in the Avalon FCC. Mr. Peterson said the project needs to work for the market so could not be primarily affordable. Due to state law, it would have to include some affordable housing components.

Mayor Sexton said there is a housing crisis in Skagit County and that supply is extremely limited. This project would help to provide a greater housing supply across the board, even if it would not be focused primarily on affordable housing.

- d. Fully Contained Community Discussion: Mr. Pernula facilitated a discussion about FCCs, starting with anticipated next steps. If the GMASC is supportive of an EIS, Skagit County would recommend looking at other potential FCCs, not just Avalon, to determine where these could occur in Skagit County and what criteria should be used to evaluate potential FCCs. It should be viewed more as a county-wide process rather than a site specific process, which would involve the Technical Advisory Committee and a large public outreach process as part of the EIS. If the GMASC is not supportive of an EIS, Skagit County would not be inclined to lead the study. After an EIS is completed, considerations to change CPPs, the 20-year population forecast and allocations could be discussed and acted upon.

Mayor Wagoner indicated that he was not supportive of the Avalon FCC. Sedro-Woolley just completed their comprehensive plan and the new FCC would be a detriment to growth in Sedro-Woolley. The people that would live at the Avalon FCC can go elsewhere in the state. Other GMASC members also indicated they had just finished their comprehensive plans and the land needed to accommodate anticipated growth is already available.

Mayor Sexton said this project is a substantial growth opportunity for Skagit County. This county faces significant water issues and agricultural land issues. This project has too many benefits to say “no” and it needs a process to move forward.

GMASC members discussed many potential impacts of an Avalon FCC including traffic, water, sewer, property taxes paying for service delivery, and consistency with local planning efforts. Mayor Sexton noted all the questions discussed could be examined through an EIS process.

Mayor Boudreau asked who would pay for the EIS. Mr. Pernula answered that the proponent has offered to pay for the EIS and Skagit County would be the lead agency and expend staff time on it. The likely cost of the EIS is not known at this time, but EISs can cost in the millions. Mayor Hayes said it would be inappropriate for a developer to pay for the EIS. Commissioner Wesen said there are no funds in Skagit County’s budget to pay for this EIS outright and the County would rely on the proponent to pay for the EIS. Mr. Carmichael said that Skagit Partners would pay for the EIS but the study would be the responsibility of Skagit County as the lead agency. There would be an agreement between Skagit Partners and Skagit County to fund the EIS.

Mayor Hayes moved to take action on this issue at the next meeting of the GMASC. The motion was seconded by Mayor Gere and carried, with Mayor Sexton and Boudreau opposed. Mayor Cromley said the next meeting should be short and focus on the vote for the Avalon FCC. The GMASC indicated they do not want a recommendation from the Growth Management Act Technical Advisory Committee on this issue.

4. Adjournment: A motion was made by Mayor Gere and seconded by Mayor Hayes to adjourn the meeting, which carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 3:57 p.m.

Information: A report of third-quarter 2016 billings for Growth Management Act administrative services was included in the meeting materials showing the amount billed by the Skagit Council of Governments to each jurisdiction during this timeframe.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kevin Murphy, Executive Director
Skagit Council of Governments

Date: _____

Approved:

Mayor Joan Cromley, Town of Hamilton
GMASC Chair

Date: _____

DRAFT