

County listens to growth concerns

Cities are assured boundaries for land-use plan won't shrink

By TYLER GRAF
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Cities in Clark County received assurance from commissioners Tuesday that their urban growth boundaries would not shrink as a result of the county's 20-year comprehensive land-use plan.

During a hearing, county commissioners unanimously adopted projected population and job growth numbers for the plan, which acts as a map for future growth. With a deadline of June 30, 2016, it will update a previous growth management plan that was approved in 2007.

The population and employment figures estimate the county will grow by 125,560 residents and 91,200 jobs by 2035. According to the projections, Vancouver, Battle Ground, Ridgefield and Camas would see the biggest jump in the number of residents and jobs.

But some cities asked the commissioners to take a second glance at the numbers, saying they wanted more wiggle room to expand.

Officials from Ridgefield voiced concerns that the city's 20-year population projection of 14,374 new residents wasn't high enough. The state's fifth-fastest growing city has taken steps since 2007 to cement itself as a medium-sized, full-service city. Since then, the city of 6,150 has made capital facility improvements and expanded its UGB to accommodate roughly 25,000 total residents by 2035, Councilman Lee Wells said.

Ridgefield would like to see its 20-year population allocation bumped to 17,549.

'Not set in stone'

La Center Mayor Jim Irish also asked commissioners to re-evaluate the growth plan's projections. He said La Center was facing a shortfall of buildable land, which will make the city unable to meet the county's proposed jobs-to-housing ratio, set at 1-to-1.

Oliver Orjiako, the county's community planning director, said the numbers approved by commissioners Tuesday "were not set in stone," reiterating they could change with new information.

Drafting a growth management plan that's amenable to all parties is a challenge, he said, but the county is trying to stay flexible.

Commissioners David Madore, Tom Mielke and Ed Barnes agreed to move forward with the population and jobs numbers and said they would tweak them in the coming months if they felt that was necessary. Cities will submit their growth management proposals

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to the county next month. Those proposals could be used as the basis for any changes the commissioners make.

One change was made at Tuesday's hearing. Madore motioned to amend the plan to allow more land for residential, commercial, business park and industrial development, at the recommendation of Columbia River Economic Development Council President Mike Bomar.

Commissioners also passed another resolution suspending their annual review of comprehensive plan amendments that would take place in 2015 and 2016.

As the county takes another small step toward creating a growth management plan, county officials say

they're aware of potential litigation.

In 2007, the county's urban boundary adjustments were challenged by environmental groups, including Seattle-based Futurewise. The state's Growth Management Hearings Board issued a ruling on two land-use appeals in February.

The county lost an appeal that would have added roughly 100 acres of agricultural land into Washougal's growth boundary, Orjiako said. It won an appeal to bring around 80 acres of land into Vancouver's boundary.

"Whatever we do, we can expect to be challenged," Madore said. He added that the county must be careful in how it proceeds so "if we get challenged, it will be defensible."

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