

Schools like on **POVERTY**



NATALIE BEHRING/The Columbian

Coordinator for Orchards Elementary School's Family and Community Resource Center, unpacks and organizes the school's fresh food pantry. The food is donated by Share and can be picked up by low-income families at the school.

More students than ever from low-income families, Clark County have stepped up efforts to help them

AN PARRISH
Columbian staff writer
in Clark County



are living in poverty. With only a handful of exceptions, every school in Clark

What is considered poverty?

Definition of poverty for a

County's 20-year plan due in 2016

Public discussion and an environmental review have to fit into schedule

By KAITLIN GILLESPIE
Columbian staff writer

It's crunch time for Clark County's Comprehensive Growth Management Plan update.

With a little more than a year before the county has to send its final update to the State Department of Commerce, the Comprehensive Growth Management Plan alternatives still need to be completed, and the project needs to go to the public for comment and be analyzed for environmental impact.

But what does any of that actually mean? Why should you care?

The Columbian got Community Planning Director Oliver Orjiako to answer some of the questions you may have had about the GMP but were too afraid to ask.

So what is a Comprehensive Growth Management Plan?

The plan is a set of policies, development regulations and maps developed designed to accommodate and guide growth over a 20-year period, Orjiako said. That's broad, but the umbrella of this project is massive. It's the guideline for how the county and cities

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Plan

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will handle an increasing population and job growth over the next 20 years.

According to the Office of Financial Management, which projects population increase, Clark County could have 562,207 people by 2035. At the 2010 U.S. Census, our population was 425,363 — so that would be a 32 percent increase in 25 years.

But why does the county need to develop a plan for growth?

There's the legal answer, then there's the practical answer. We'll start with the legal answer.

The Growth Management Act, enacted by the state Legislature in 1990, requires that cities and counties with larger populations or higher growth rates develop comprehensive plans, Orjiako said. Counties and cities work together to predict how much their populations will grow. The GMA requires the county to review its growth area at least every eight years.

Here's the practical answer, and the reason you should care: You know all those services you use? Roads, schools, libraries, police, fire? That's why. As more people are born or move to Clark County, that creates a higher demand for those services, so the county and cities will build new po-

lice precincts, bus stops, fire stations and the list goes on. For the cities, that means they have to include enough land into an "Urban Growth Boundary" to accommodate population growth and organize where they'll construct those services.

What's the deal with the 'Alternatives'? What does that mean?

The term "Alternative" is a bit of a misnomer. The Community Planning Department has currently outlined three alternatives. The county can adopt bits and pieces of these alternatives based on what they see as the most likely outcome for the county's needs within the next 20 years. There's also an Alternative 4, but we'll get to that.

■ **Alternative 1** assumes no change in Clark County. The map stays as is, cities don't get any new land and nothing is rezoned. There's always one "do-nothing" plan, Orjiako said. Think back to your high school science classes. This is the "control" group.

■ **Alternative 2**, called the rural and urban alternative, makes changes all over the map to accommodate job and population growth and clean up inconsistencies in zoning.

■ **Alternative 3** includes opportunity for Battle Ground and La Center to expand their urban growth boundaries to support job growth. Ridgefield, La Center and Washougal have made some late requests for growth as well. Those will be presented

Public Meeting

■ **What:** Board of County Councilors' work session on the Comprehensive Growth Management Plan.

■ **When:** 9 a.m. Wednesday

■ **Where:** Clark County Public Service Center, 1300 Franklin St., Vancouver.

■ **Information:** www.clark.wa.gov/planning

at a council work session on Wednesday.

But wait, what about Alternative 4?

Alternative 4 rezones 6,500 acres of agricultural and forestry land to rural land to reflect current development on those lands, said Peter Silliman, an assistant/policy analyst for the Board of County Councilors. Silliman developed Alternative 4, but he's not a member of the planning staff.

If adopted, the plan will put parcels that are currently not in compliance back into compliance, said.

Clark County Citizens United, a group that represents rural landowners' interests, requested Alternative 4. Now the group says it doesn't do enough to rezone parcels that Executive Secretary Carol Levanan says were unlawfully taken from landowners in 1994, back when the county first adopted a comprehensive growth plan.

Their opposition group,

Friends of Clark County, doesn't like the plan either, saying it creates too much "spot zoning" — small parcels way out in the middle of nowhere that can strain resources — rather than efficient development, said President Sydney Reisbeck.

A final draft of the alternative is supposed to be presented at a Board of County Councilors work session Wednesday.

It's worth noting that in January, the board directed Silliman to draft Alternative 4 and told planning staff to stop working on the comprehensive plan. That means drafting an Environmental Impact Statement in accordance with the State Environmental Policy Act has been delayed, Orjiako said.

Silliman was the subject of controversy last year when he was appointed to his position with the board, according to Columbian archives. Silliman is a former freeholder who led the campaign against the Home Rule Charter that passed in November. He also has no background in urban planning. Prior to working for the county, he was an engineer at Century-Link.

What's the timeline?

Orjiako posed a tentative timeline at last month's work session that was conspicuously absent of any dates. But the way Orjiako talks about it, the county needs to get cooking. There are still open houses to be held, joint meetings between the board and the planning commis-

sion and plenty of time for public comments on the environmental impact statement. The drafting of the environmental impact statement in and of itself can take weeks. If you've never seen or had to read an environmental impact statement, it's a doozy of a document, sometimes spreading thousands of pages in multiple binders. The county needs to submit the final plan, with board approval, to the state Commerce Department by April 30, 2016.

And if the county doesn't meet that deadline?

"It's possible there could be sanctions placed on the county, such as the inability to apply for state loans and grants," Orjiako said. "Without an adopted capital facilities plan — a required part of a comprehensive plan — jurisdictions cannot collect impact fees to fund various infrastructure improvements."

Clark County will host another work session at 9 a.m. Wednesday in the sixth floor hearing room at the Public Service Center, 1300 Franklin St., Vancouver. Open houses are planned for 5:30 p.m. March 25 at Ridgefield High School and 5:30 p.m. April 1 at Hockinson High School. A board hearing on the plan is tentatively scheduled for 10 a.m. April 14 at the Public Service Center hearing room.

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