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# 20-year growth projection OK'd

## County commissioners accept 1.12% estimate over builders' objections

By **TYLER GRAF**  
Columbian staff writer

Clark County commissioners Tuesday approved a 20-year population projection, despite grumbles from builders who said the figure was too low.

The Washington Office of Financial Management prepared three projections for the county. Commissioners chose the middle one, anticipating annual growth of 1.12 percent over the next two decades. If that holds true, then the county's population will reach

562,207 by 2035.

The county's estimated population in 2012 was 438,287, according to the most recent census data.

Building industry representatives at Tuesday's hearing said anything but the highest possible projection — 1.8 percent annually — could put constraints on future development. The lowest possible projection was an annual growth rate of 0.31 percent.

Estimating population growth is an early piece of a larger puzzle for the county as it moves ahead with a proposed update to its comprehensive land-use plan. The state requires the county to review its growth management plan every eight years and revise it if necessary. The state provides

guidance on population growth, while it's up to the county to predict employment numbers.

The population projection is one variable guiding county growth.

The county last updated its growth management plan in 2007. Since then, the county's growth has dipped below 1 percent.

Despite that lag, James Howsley, government affairs director for the Building Industry Association of Clark County, said the 1.12 percent projected increase didn't take into account the larger historical picture of growth in the county.

"The forecast for the medium range misses the mark for growth over the next 20 years," he said.

Howsley said the state's projections were predicated on the slow-

down in new-home construction and a recent cross-state migration of residents. The building industry expects those trends to change in the coming years, he said, and that should be reflected in the county's growth plan.

Eric Golemo, owner of SGA Engineering and Design, agreed, saying there was no risk in the county approving the highest 20-year population projection. That 1.8 percent annual projection predicts the county's population will reach 681,135 by 2035.

"You get caught off-guard when you don't plan for the future," Golemo said. "When growth comes, you're not ready for it."

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## Growth

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Commissioners, who voted 3-0 for the 1.12 percent projection, had support from cities throughout the county.

It means cities won't be on the hook for high-density development down the road, Commissioner Steve Stuart said.

He said the projection will also protect the county from another housing bust. The county still has to address vacant and buildable land, parcel size and transportation issues within its comprehensive plan.

"Part of our job is to make sure we don't repeat history," Stuart said.

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