



October 16, 2015

Chair David Madore  
Councilor Tom Mielke  
Councilor Jeanne Stewart



**SUBJECT:** City of Vancouver Comments on Preferred Alternative for Clark County Comprehensive Plan Update Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (FSEIS)

Honorable Councilors:

On behalf of the City of Vancouver we thank you for the opportunity to comment, and appreciate the time and resources Clark County has devoted to the Comprehensive Plan update process over the past two years. Our comments:

**We do not support resetting the process:**

- Since 2013 this update has included initial adoption of long term growth forecasts, and later re-visitation and increase of the population forecast; adoption of planning assumptions, principles and values; issuance of a Buildable Lands Report; publication of a DEIS with four alternatives for comment; and public hearings leading to a County Planning Commission recommendation of a preferred alternative on September 17, 2015.
- The October 20 hearing is advertised to consider the Planning Commission preferred alternative recommendation. We understand that Councilors are working to replace the Planning Commission recommendation with an unspecified plan that has not been released. This work includes changes to the published DEIS, and potential consideration of new growth forecasts that drive the entire process.
- Substantive change to the existing DEIS will require reissuance and major changes to the growth forecasts will require a new analysis. Given the range of issues to consider we respectfully request the Board not limit city testimony to 3 minutes on October 20.
- A process reset at this late stage will make it impossible to meet the June 30, 2016 statutory deadline for adoption. Not meeting the statutory deadline will place the

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County in noncompliance with the Growth Management Act (GMA) which could result in ineligibility for state grant funding and potential sanctions. Resetting the process will also undermine the cities' comprehensive plans and require more involvement and resources from all local jurisdictions in what has already been a lengthy and expensive process.

We urge the Board to fully consider the implications of major changes to this process, particularly since there are options under the law. Rural changes are not subject to the June 2016 deadline, and could be addressed next year or in any future year. Growth forecasts must be adopted by June 2016, but could then be adjusted in any future year, and must be fully revisited in 8 years. This ensures that 20-year land supplies will not come close to running out before they are replenished, even if the pace of growth is faster than anticipated.

**We support DEIS Alternative 3, and the Board's decisions and direction over the past two years regarding growth forecasts and Urban Growth Areas**

- The Board's much discussed efforts to increase the ratio of jobs-to-housing and keeping cities whole by not forcing unrequested UGA changes are sound policy objectives. The long term growth forecasts adopted by the Board in 2013 and then increased last year are consistent with these objectives, and provide for ample growth, as all of the cities have testified (see 4/8/15 and 11/26/14 joint letters).

The Alternative 3 population forecast now calls for growth of approximately 130,000 persons, some 15,000 persons more than OFM predicts is most likely to occur. This forecast averages to a yearly rate consistent with historical County growth rates over the past 5 years. An increase of any significance to this population forecast will certainly trigger unplanned UGA expansions, increased capital facility needs, and thwart a goal of improving the ratio of jobs to housing. Vancouver, like other cities, is still catching up with the 2007 UGA expansions, which were the largest in state history and primarily devoted to residential land

- Vancouver proposes no changes to its UGA in this update cycle, but supports Alternative 3 and the limited jobs-oriented expansions proposed by some of the other cities
- We support the modest changes in the unincorporated VUGA recommended by the County Planning Commission, with the exception at this time of recommendation 2q. Recommendation 2q calls for the removal of the Urban Holding (UH) designations in the Fisher's Swale area. The County's Comprehensive Plan requires explicit transportation findings be made prior to removal of the UH designations in Fisher's Swale. The DEIS does not include this required analysis and findings. We are particularly concerned, based on the location directly between Vancouver and Camas, that adequate east-west and north-south circulation be provided. The Final

EIS must include analysis of how the proposed UH removal complies with the County requirement to provide for area circulation prior to UH removal.

**We do not support widespread rural upzones proposed in Alternatives 2 and 4, and agree with the County Planning Commission's near-unanimous recommendation that these be excluded from this process:**

- The DEIS confirms that the rural upzones contained in these two alternatives would be unprecedented in terms of size and impacts to citizens and taxpayers countywide, including those in the rural area. Alternatives 2 and 4 cover 50 and 100 square miles respectively, and allow for thousands more future lots than could be created currently; both will require transportation improvements throughout the county, and both involve "prohibitive" infrastructure costs.
- Traffic safety will be compromised, as noted by County Planning Commissioner Bill Wright, a former County Transportation official, at the September 17 deliberations:  
I can say without I think anyone disagreeing, I probably have as much knowledge about the county road network out there as anybody in the room now, and most of the roads out there were neither designed nor built to any standard. They are game trails turned into farm-to-market roads. They're narrow. They're ditched, steep ditches on both sides, a lot of curves, sight distance issues, substandard intersections, and to put three or four or five or six trips per day per household onto those roads would be unconscionable and so I cannot support this.
- The DEIS further finds that Alternatives 2 and 4 would increase the risk of rural groundwater contamination and reduction of water supply, and both "will change the character of rural Clark County."
- Local land use attorneys representing both development and conservation interests have testified at length about the illegality of these proposals under GMA. Unlike prior County Comprehensive Plan EIS', the existing analysis of Alternatives 2 and 4 fails to comply with legal requirements - it excludes virtually any information on the location or magnitude of the various projected impacts. This has prevented cities, service providers, property owners, or anyone else with a particular geographic interest from understanding or providing informed comment on how the various alternatives impact their areas. A successful legal challenge to the proposed upzones or the EIS will at best result in local governments and interested parties investing extensive time and financial resources to take up the Comprehensive Plan update process again. At worst it could result in the invalidation of local plans.

To be clear, the City of Vancouver supports allowing a range of rural activities consistent with rural values. The County has pursued these issues through many initiatives outside of this Comprehensive Plan update process recently, such as proposing a 600-acre Rural Industrial Land Bank, allowing more uses in Rural Centers, considering changes to rural home occupations' standards, and more recently proposing allowances for rural accessory dwelling units.

However, the sweeping upzones proposed in Alternatives 2 and 4 have been found by the County's own documents and review bodies to be unprecedented in size, prohibitively expensive, and unsafe. They have been found by local attorneys to be inconsistent with state law, and no County analyses, staff testimony or review body has argued otherwise. They appear to be unsupported by large segments of the rural area which would not benefit from the development opportunities they allow, but instead be faced with the impacts.

Again, we reiterate our support for Alternative 3 as proposed and, given the complexity and importance of these issues, respectfully request additional time beyond three minutes to testify at the public hearing. Thank you for the opportunity to comment and for considering input on behalf of the City of Vancouver.

Sincerely,



Chad Eiken, AICP, Director

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