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## Planning Commission rejects Alternative 4 again



Photo by JC Cortez

**THE CLARK COUNTY PLANNING** Commission voted 5-1 last week to reject alterations to proposed alternatives and planning assumptions and re-issued an earlier Comp. Plan recommendation unchanged.

*Clark County officials spar over Comprehensive Plan update as deadline adds pressure to move forward*

**JC CORTEZ**  
staff reporter

For a second time, the Clark County Planning Commission forwarded the Board of County Councilors (BOCC) a Comprehensive Growth Management Plan update recommendation that included no part of the controversial Alternative 4 proposal.

Commissioners made the recommendation during a public hearing Thursday evening at the end of a busy week for the Comp. Plan update process. In recent weeks, Councilor David Madore has proposed a new "Plan B" set of planning assumptions that, among other things, would raise the projected population for Clark County over the next 20 years. The BOCC also recently approved alterations to the Alternative 4 update proposal in response to an earlier planning commission recommendation, which also left out any sign of Alternative 4.

Madore questioned data and projections in the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS).

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### Comp Plan

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mental Environmental Impact Statement (DSEIS) used by the commission to form their original recommendation in October, saying it used "unrealistic" assumptions about the county's growth. In response, he made alterations to the proposal — a fact which itself has become a point of contention as critics openly worry about the effect of changing foundational facts so late in the process.

"The concerns and recommendations expressed by the DSEIS, citizen testimony and city representatives have provided me with valuable feedback to make Alternative 4 better," Madore said. "As a result, Alternative 4 has been updated to lessen impacts and mitigate concerns."

But commissioners questioned the process by which Madore came up with the new planning assumptions. At a meeting at Ridgefield High School last week, Madore invited community members to examine the assumptions for themselves to see which set they find more reasonable.

To arrive at their original recommendation, the planning commission examined each of the 4 proposed alternatives and voted on every individual provision separately. No part of Alternative 4 survived that process.

Thursday's hearing took a drastically different direction early on as planning commission Vice Chair Ron Barca moved to re-issue the previous recommendation and end the

hearing almost immediately after convening. That idea caused a stir among several citizens who made a special trip to the Public Service Center to voice their concerns.

"Does that mean I won't get to speak?" one woman called from the audience.

In the end, county legal staff advised against ending the meeting without hearing public testimony. The motion did not pass.

Throughout the week, often passionate rural and urban citizens, elected officials and city representatives talked about their concerns for and against Alternative 4 and the proposed planning assumptions.

"I don't think people should be afraid of the future," said Mike Fulton, an accountant who works in Portland and owns rural property near Ridgefield.

"And you know what?" He continued. "The future includes a lot more people."

Fulton expressed frustration at what he called the planning commission's "defensive" stance and refusal to consider Madore's proposals.

"The problem is they obviously weren't willing to listen to anything but their own assumptions," he said. "For instance, if you look at the ... lots, they just assumed everything would be buildable. But that's actually not true."

Fulton pointed to the building permit process as evidence that many rural properties will be slow to develop and many may never develop at all because of environmental constraints.

"Alternative 1 does not consider the future like it should," he

said. "Property is actually going to end up becoming more expensive because they're not going to meet the housing needs of the community."

Others disagreed. In a joint letter to the planning commission signed by representatives of the cities of Battle Ground, Camas, La Center, Ridgefield, Washougal, Vancouver, and Woodland, officials expressed "grave concerns" with the BOCC's process and Alternative 4's viability under Washington's Growth Management Act.

Madore brushed off concerns of legality Tuesday.

"We would be silly to propose things that we know, on the face of it, would just not comply with the law," he said.

When asked, he admitted he expected Alt 4 to be challenged in court if adopted.

"What's important is that we can defend it when it gets there," he said.

In a separate letter to the planning commission, Chad Eiken, Community and Economic Development Director with the City of Vancouver, took issue with the proposal to alter planning assumptions.

"The proposed rural assumptions are not supported by rural development data, and in many cases not even with a credible rationale," Eiken wrote in the letter.

Fulton also expressed dismay at a perceived infringement of rural landowners' property rights under the current Comprehensive Plan, which would remain in ef-

fect under Alternative 1.

"You have these people in the city who don't own land in the county and they want to tell people in the county what they can do with their land," he said. "They don't want people in the county to do anything with the land because they want ... (to) go out and enjoy nature regardless of what the people who own the property would like to do with it."

Despite the complicated proposals and tangled opinions, the commission kept to a simple path. Commissioners voted 5 to 1 to ignore the revised planning assumptions, disregard alterations to Alt 4, and reissue their earlier recommendation.

The Board of County Councilors will vote on a preferred

alternative to be studied in a Final Environmental Impact Statement during a regular hearing Tuesday morning. Check [www.TheReflector.com](http://www.TheReflector.com) Tuesday evening for an update.

On Friday, a day after the planning commission rejected Alternative 4 for a second time, Councilor Madore posted a social media update inviting the public to the Tuesday hearing at the Public Service Center, 1300 Franklin St. in Vancouver.

"The case for a new rural properties plan: If it's not broke don't fix it," the post read. "But if it is, don't make excuse(s) ... Our rural property zoning map is broken. Tuesday marks the day we can take a big step to fix it," Madore wrote.