

Kittitas County Board of Commissioners
Public Hearing
October 29, 2008

As the contracted professional planner assisting the City of Kittitas, I have been asked to provide written comment in an effort to describe and clarify issues regarding the City's comprehensive plan and development regulations. It is with regrets that I am not able to attend your hearing in person to answer questions that may arise. Where prior commitments don't interfere, I am available to provide any other additional information that may assist you in resolving this very important issue for the City of Kittitas.

The City of Kittitas embarked on the GMA-required comprehensive plan and development regulation review and update process early in 2006. Based on a review of the existing comprehensive plan, adopted in 1997, the existing and outdated zoning (1994), critical areas (1994) and subdivision (1979) codes, a work plan was developed to significantly update both the comprehensive plan and zoning regulations. This significant re-write was also predicated on significant population growth and subdivision activity occurring at the time that was unprecedented in the City's history. Essentially, the City determined that it was necessary, because of significant changes in their community, to completely re-evaluate how and where their community would grow, resulting in a completely new comprehensive plan and associated implementation regulations.

As the City's comprehensive plan was developed, there was significant focus and discussion on the part of the community to respect and implement the requirement in the Growth Management Act that urban growth areas be realistically sized based on population projections, the projected needed land uses for that population, and on the ability for the area to be provided with urban levels of capital facilities and services. During the spring and summer of 2006, the technical work related to updating the comprehensive plan occurred, including completing a parcel-by-parcel field inventory of existing land uses, reviewing population and growth information, particularly related to the on-going subdivision activity taking place, and conducting initial land use and capital facilities analyses.

Numerous significant factors were discovered and documented during this initial technical analysis work. For example, it was discovered that, according to the 2000 US Census of Population, 87% of residents in the City of Kittitas drive more than 10 minutes to work. Additionally, in the 10 year period from 1990 to 2000, the population of the City of Kittitas had grown by 262 people, which is 56 more people than the population increase was for the previous 20 year period between 1970 and 1990. And, where the City had previously seen very few subdivisions of land in previous decades, 57 new lots had been approved in 2004/2005, and 187 additional lots were in varying degrees of application submittal, review and approval during 2006/2007 (since adoption of the plan, all of these additional lots have received preliminary approval). The initial analysis of the UGA, as it existed in early 2006, clearly showed that the City would need additional land for residential uses to accommodate the population projection for the Kittitas UGA. It was also derived from this analysis that, if the City wanted to "...provide a strong tax base, reduce travel time, improve the quality of life and job opportunities...", it would be important to increase the areas available for commercial and industrial activities.

During the summer of 2006, the City Council and City Planning Commission were approached, at public meetings, by two groups that were in the process of applying to Kittitas County for the City's Urban Growth Area to be expanded. In a letter submitted by the City to the County Commissioners in September of 2006, support for these applications was expressed, as follows:

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Exhibit # 17
Date: Oct. 29, 2008
Submitted By: BCCC

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"For a number of reasons, the general consensus at those different public meetings was that adding those areas to the Kittitas UGA would be beneficial to the community: first, as an area for future economic development that would support commercial uses, resulting in retail sales tax revenue and jobs for the City; and second, to help the community deal with the increased demand for land that is suitable for future residential development.

The City is currently in the process of reviewing and updating our Comprehensive Plan and Development Regulations as required by the Growth Management Act. As part of that process, a detailed land use and capital facilities analysis will be conducted to assess and document the City's needs to address future growth and development. During those studies, the City will be analyzing opportunities, alternatives and infrastructure impacts that involve both of these proposed expansion areas, in addition to incorporating the City's wastewater treatment plant into the UGA (as requested through the City's application to the County for a UGA amendment).

The City would like to encourage the Board of County Commissioners to consider these above factors as you deliberate and decide on the proposed Kittitas UGA expansion requests."

During the remainder of 2006 and into 2007, the City Planning Commission went through a very deliberate process to arrive at a recommendation for a completely new comprehensive plan and zoning code that balanced the requirement for a realistically sized UGA, while still accommodating and supporting economic growth and development. The recommendation included a detailed vision statement about the future of the City of Kittitas, incorporating (in part) the idea that the community wanted to maintain a quality living environment for its residents by providing adequate urban services, and by promoting and expanding business development opportunities that would create jobs and increase incomes for both residents as well as the City. The recommended Comprehensive Plan included a UGA that had been evaluated on a community-wide basis, and was supported by population, land use and capital facilities analyses. It did not simply look at whether or not the two areas under consideration by the County for an expanded Kittitas UGA were necessary. Because of the numerous factors mentioned above (increased residential development, policy decisions to increase business opportunities), the City chose to completely and comprehensively re-evaluate the future land use needs of their community.

The City Planning Commission worked through a process of developing land use designations, applying those designations to the ground in different alternatives, and reviewing these designations against the population projections, land use analysis and the new UGA. Several options were discussed to achieve a balance, including looking at different residential densities and how residential uses are allowed in the various zones, different land use designation maps, innovative development tools and potentially reducing the overall size of the UGA by taking other, existing areas out of the UGA. It was discussed that, if at all possible, maintaining the full size of the UGA was most important so that existing property owners weren't faced with having their development opportunities significantly reduced by being newly excluded from the UGA. In the end, a combination of techniques was utilized, including the following:

- Lower base residential densities (for example 4 units per acre as opposed to 6 units per acre in single family areas), coupled with the option for more innovative development opportunities utilizing a planned development regulation;
- A significant reduction in the amount and type of residential uses that are allowed in the commercial and industrial zones (generally, only caretakers' residences); and
- A re-arrangement of the land use designations and where they are applied.

It is also important to clarify that certain excerpts from the City's Comprehensive Plan have recently been quoted and have either been, at best, misunderstood and/or mischaracterized in an effort to indicate that the City has not identified a need for additional land to be included in the UGA. The quote is as follows from page 12:

"The Kittitas UGA has land available to meet these residential needs while preserving critical areas, providing parks and right-of-way and keeping market values affordable."

Some may choose to read this statement as applying to the UGA as it existed prior to late 2006. However, when reviewed comprehensively and objectively, without any filters that may be generated by the issues raised in the appeal of the County's decision in 2006, it is clearly applicable to the UGA that is depicted on the maps that are adopted as part of the Comprehensive Plan. All of the maps that are included in the comprehensive plan show an urban growth area that includes the expanded UGA adopted by the County in late 2006. According to the Growth Management Act, the action of a local government in adopting a GMA document is presumed valid. The City adopted its comprehensive plan in July of 2007, prior to an order being issued by the Eastern Washington Growth Management Hearings Board, in good faith, and with the fundamental belief, which still holds, that it is consistent with the goals and intent of the Growth Management Act.

The process that the City of Kittitas went through, spanning more than 12 months from early 2006 to mid 2007, was a comprehensive, community-based effort that thoroughly evaluated and addressed the requirements of the Growth Management Act. It resulted in a new vision for the future of the community, expressed through the comprehensive plan, and in the development of updated implementation tools to bring the City up-to-date with new and changing local conditions. Hopefully, this summary provides some insight into, and adequately reflects, the work, energy and resources that went into this community-based effort.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this information.

Respectfully,

Lisa Parks, AICP
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