

**From:** [Jack Petree](#)  
**To:** [PDS Planning Commission](#)  
**Subject:** testimony to planning commission for 10/22/15 meeting  
**Date:** Wednesday, October 21, 2015 2:53:33 PM  
**Attachments:** [memo to county pc re- lack of jobs and population capture by Bellingham.doc](#)

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Commissioners,

Below, and attached for your convenience, is a discussion of the importance of population and economic projections to proper Growth Management planning.

Thank you for your time,

Regards,

Jack Petree

**MEMO: 10/20/15**

**RE: Accurate Population And Employment Projections Matter**

To: Whatcom County Planning Commission

CC: Bellingham City Council

Planning Commissioners,

As you've read staff materials regarding the review and update of Whatcom County's Comprehensive Plan you may have noticed:

**Bellingham** since the last planning effort **has only been able to capture about 30% of population growth coming to Whatcom County.**

**Bellingham** has done even more poorly with jobs. 2008 – 2013 **the city has captured just over 20% of the new jobs in Whatcom County.**

Noticing that, you've probably asked yourself one, or both, of two questions:

**"Why is Bellingham's growth management performance so abysmal?"**

and,

**"Why is Bellingham asking you to assign population and employment projections 140% larger and more than 300% larger, respectively than the City is currently able to achieve?"**

The answer to the first question comes from the fact that, “The laws of supply and demand have yet to be repealed.” As has been repeatedly demonstrated by hundreds of professional studies, the results of which have been often reported to you, **Bellingham’s land supply for housing is completely out of step with the wants and needs of the citizens of Whatcom County, old hands and newcomers alike.**

Equally, Bellingham’s jobs lands are equally out of step with the demands of the marketplace. Port of Seattle studies demonstrate SeaTac airport produces more jobs and economic activity than the water port does. Bellingham has refused to annex lands around Whatcom County’s airport; **as a result of Bellingham’s tardiness, the County’s most prime business lands consist of parking lots and bare landscapes with sewer and water lines running beneath them but kept unavailable as a result of City policy.** A city staff report from 2008 points to serious deficits in the ability of other City lands to meet the needs of new business.

The answer to the second question is financial. Federal, State, and local grants are often based on projected needs. **A high population and employment projection can greatly enhance a city’s access to grant money.**

The current Comprehensive Plan process is all too often characterized as being an “update.” In actuality, the process is, by law, a *review* followed by county and city actions necessary to “...revise their comprehensive plans and development regulations to ensure the plan and regulations comply with the requirements of this chapter...” **We are supposed to be honestly assessing the success or failure of past planning effort, analyzing what has gone right and what has gone wrong, and then, making the changes necessary to “fix” the problems we find.**

Isn’t it time today, on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Growth Management Act, to grow up and begin to plan for growth rather than looking the other way and whistling past the graveyard of failed plans?

Regards,

Jack Petree