SUBJECT: 2016 Comprehensive Plan Updates: Introduction to Land Use Element

DATE: September 10, 2014

FROM: Jori Burnett Community Development Director

PRESENTATION BY: Jori Burnett

EXHIBIT 1: REDLINED VERSION OF LAND USE ELEMENT

RECOMMENDATIONS:
No action is required. Staff has presented the Introduction and Transportation Elements of the Comprehensive Plan to the Planning Commission at the two previous Planning Commission meetings. The Land Use element is the next element to be considered.

The element is simply being introduced, along with staff notes and observations. Staff hopes to receive direction from the Planning Commission on several parts of this chapter, and will work on the first three elements during the Planning Commission’s summer recess. The elements will be re-introduced later this year or in early 2015 for a more rigorous review.

BACKGROUND:
As the element states, repeatedly, the Land Use Element is the backbone of the Comprehensive Plan. The element is charged with synthesizing the information and analysis from the other elements of the comprehensive plan, creating a plan that supports each element in harmony with the other chapters.

Although the Land Use Element draws its conclusions from the conclusions of other elements (which are also due to be updated as part of the 2016 process), it is not too early to start considering amendments to the element. Staff has included a large number of notes, questions, and thoughts in the red-lined version of the element (Exhibit 1). We recognize that the element is long and dry – and that the long, dry days do not assist in deep concentration – so we will attempt to summarize our thoughts in this staff report.

The chapter itself is composed of five main areas: the overall concept of a Land Use Element, a discussion of existing conditions (population, the amount of land reserved for different uses, existing capacity), a projection of future needs (essentially building on the existing conditions discussion), the changes necessary to meet these needs – and finally a list of goals and policies to achieve the land use vision of the City. In addition, a discussion of the basis for
the Land Use Element as defined by state law (the Growth Management Act) as well as the Countywide Planning policies is included. The staff report is broken down into these broad categories, in addition to general formatting changes.

**ANALYSIS:**

**Formatting**

To begin with, staff expects to reformat this element along with other elements of the plan to include such things as hyperlinks, illustrative breakouts and graphs, pictures, and other objects that may break up the monotony of text and enable quick navigation for electronic users.

In addition to breaking up the text there are several facts that are repeated over and over in the chapter – as an example, the element reminds the reader that there are 3,238 acres in the UGA no less than six times.

Staff does not anticipate a full rewrite of the Land Use Element. However, the element has not been updated since 2005, and parts of the chapter have not been updated since 1996. There are sections that are showing their age, in staff’s opinion.

Staff does hope to make some changes to the formatting of the chapter: the basis for the plan and the recitals of the Growth Management Act are likely unnecessary within the first part of the element. We believe that most readers will understand that the basis for the element is well-established, and while it should be included in the chapter, the full discussion of the GMA should be later in the element. *Does the Planning Commission agree with this approach?*

The Planning Commission may also wish to reconsider how the Comprehensive Plan relates to other documents. For instance, should the Comprehensive Plan include statistics describing the zoning in the City? We do not believe it should – that is the responsibility of the Ferndale Municipal Code. Similarly, on Pages 25-26, the Land Use Element describes the *Whatcom County* zoning in the unincorporated UGA, the location of that zoning, and the overall extent of that zoning. Whatcom County’s zoning may change without notification or participation of the City of Ferndale. Still, this is important information – it would likely be much more simple to either attach a hyperlink or describe where Whatcom County zoning information (or maps) may be located.

As part of this reformatting – and similar to other elements – staff proposes an outline of the chapter at the beginning. This will enable the reader to quickly go to the area of text that they are interested in and will provide a brief glimpse of what the element includes.

Lastly, staff would appreciate guidance from the Planning Commission as to where the various maps contained within the Land Use Element should be located. Pages 33-39 are devoted to maps showing geologically hazardous areas, aquifers, flood areas, shorelines, and more. This is important information that may be used by readers who are interested in more than land use – but the
maps are buried in the middle of the element. Is there a more-appropriate location for these maps?

Existing Conditions

Many of the changes proposed by staff are straightforward updates to population totals, land use ratios (commercial, residential, industrial), growth assumptions, and achieved densities. While it will take some time to calculate these numbers, there are no real policy choices attached to them – they are what they are.

Projection of Future Needs/ Changes Necessary to Meet Future Needs

The projection of future needs will largely depend on the conclusions of the other elements of the comprehensive plan, and may be one of the last ingredients to be added to this element. Some of the work has already been done – the Land Capacity Analysis (LCA) that has been put together by city and county staff identifies the overall land needs for the City. The initial conclusion of the LCA is that the City will not need to change the UGA boundaries. However, within this initial conclusion the City may need to make some land use decisions, either changing land use designations, or (more likely) amending the comp plan to ensure it is consistent with the choices that have already been made.

Within this discussion, the City will need to take stock of its assumptions. As noted in staff comments attached to Exhibit 1, many of the land use assumptions for the next twenty years remain rooted in 1996 and are based on the 1996 Comprehensive Plan. There have been dramatic changes in land use since 1996, and while residential development has seen evolutionary changes – an increase in the desire for smaller lots is one example – commercial development has experienced revolutionary changes. The 1996 plan was written towards the end of the shopping mall era (only two malls were built in 2013 nationwide), and at the very beginning of the big box era. Big box/brick and mortar stores are increasingly threatened by online retailers – and a future dominated by big box is not as certain as it was just five years ago. Does the Planning Commission wish to discuss the future of retail development in the comprehensive plan? Do we know what the future will be? Do the current assumptions for retail development in the comp plan still hold true?

Staff has added language that may bridge the gap (Page 16 and 17 of Exhibit 1) between the current assumptions and future assumptions – essentially acknowledging that commercial development is in a state of flux, and that we “cannot rely exclusively on current trends to project development in 2036.”

As noted, residential development has evolved over time. The 1996 comprehensive plan far overestimated city growth – so much so that the overall population estimated for 2016 is still above what is estimated in 2036. This resulted in an over-sized UGA, but it also anticipated that overall infill development would be much more pronounced. In some ways, this helps the current update: the growth anticipated in certain areas is still anticipated, and some of the assumptions can simply be rolled over into the next update (with some changes, of course).
There are some tweaks that need to be made to residential growth assumptions. On Page 22, the Comprehensive Plan anticipates that residential development will average five units per gross acre in the Low Density Residential land use designation. Low Density Residential includes the RS 10.5 (10,500 square foot minimum lot size) and RS 8.5 (8,500 sf minimum). The RS 10.5 zone can achieve only 4.14 units per gross acre, and this calculation does not include roads, stormwater, wetlands, or other deductions. The RS 8.5 zone can achieve 5.12 units per gross acre without deductions. In either case, it is impossible to achieve an average of 5 units per gross acre with these zones, and it is still very difficult to achieve those densities with a net acre calculation. The math simply does not work.

The introduction of lot averaging and the continued use of the Planned Unit Development process will resolve some or most of this issue. In any case, the assumptions will need to be reconsidered.

Goals and Policies

The goals and policies section likely warrants a broader discussion with the community and the City Council. But it is never too early to start the conversation. Staff hopes that this conversation will add to the goals and policies that are already established, rather than fundamentally change the City’s direction.

Overall, the goals and policies do a good job of stating what the goals and policies are – but they do not do a good job of describing how they might be achieved, or (in some cases) what they actually mean. This is a problem in all comprehensive plans – and really all long-range plans (public and private).

For example – how does the City “encourage new development consisting of a variety of land uses adjacent to existing development?” Does this mean that the City will include such development as an allowed use? Does it mean that the City will provide incentives?

The Planning Commission may also consider the City’s role in commercial development. Within the existing Commercial Land Use Policies, the City is expected to take a passive role in the revitalization of Downtown: “support efforts to revitalize the downtown area undertaken by the Main Street Organization and/or other civic groups.”

Have these efforts been successful? Has the City supported these groups? Should the City support all private efforts to revitalize downtown – or should the City act as a leader in downtown revitalization? Does the City revitalize downtown by building new public buildings, streets, and parks in the downtown area (as it has done), or should the City do more (or less) – such as reducing fees or even subsidizing development in the core? Should the City set a high standard for redevelopment, or should the City be grateful for any development that comes in?

These are but two examples of the goals and policies. Staff does not expect that the Planning Commission will have all of the answers – and certainly the Planning Commission shouldn’t attempt to speak for all parties. But the goals
and policies should be meaningful if they are to be looked at once the comprehensive plan is adopted.

**CONCLUSIONS:**

The overall scope of changes for the Land Use Element is not dramatic. Most of the changes will occur automatically, based on new analysis that is generated over the next six months to a year. Much of the rest of the changes are cosmetic and are intended to create a more readable document.

Many of the actual policy decisions are, ironically, not found in the text but are memorialized in the Comprehensive Plan Map. Staff does not anticipate major changes to this map, as it has been updated over the last few years. Thus, the remainder of the policy decisions are based on the City’s goals and policies, and the language used in the text itself.

Staff is very open to further discussion:

- Are any of staff’s recommended changes simply “make work” projects?
- Does the Planning Commission feel that the language in the goals and policies needs to be changed?
- How much background on the GMA should be included in the Land Use Element?
- Should the Land Use Element refer to other documents that serve as the basis for decision making (Whatcom County Comp Plan, Land Use Code, etc.) – or should it attempt to provide a cliff-notes version of those other plans?
- Are there any other changes that should be made?

Staff will continue to work on the Introduction, Transportation and Land Use Elements through July and August, and will introduce a new element for discussion in September.

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1 And measurable: in the downtown example, the City has invested over $20 million over the last decade on a number of civic improvements within the Downtown core. Goals and policies that cannot be defined generally cannot be achieved. If a goal or policy is not working, there should be some way to make that determination.
Chapter II — Land Use

INTRODUCTION

The Land Use Element is the heart of the city’s Comprehensive Plan. Land is a vital and finite resource. Land drives the economy of a city, and its use determines the city’s character. Growth and land development carry significant costs, not only to the developer or builder, but also to neighboring land users and the community as a whole. Developed land is an ongoing financial responsibility for the taxpaying public. Roads, water and sewer, police and fire protection, and other services have costs that must be considered when designating land for development. Because fiscal resources, both public and private, are limited, it is important to consider the long-term effects of land use. With careful planning, the substantial investment that is often necessary to serve land is better secured and protected.

Planning provides the basis for nearly all productive effort. Community leaders, while consistently dealing with the day-to-day issues which arise, must be ever-conscious of the future and the long term consequences of each day-to-day decision, and should develop and follow plans and policies which will give purpose and direction to the changing conditions within the community. Community leaders as well as citizens need to realize that growth should take place in a manner which is financially prudent and orderly, and that the quality of life within the community should always be maintained.

Unlike a building project which has both a beginning and an end, a community is always “in process” and never completed. In addition, through the election and appointment processes those individuals who serve the City as public officials and who are responsible for providing direction, are themselves constantly in change. The primary function of the Comprehensive Plan in general, and the Land Use Element in particular is to provide a measure of continuity to the constantly changing conditions within the community.

In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court, in an attempt to help clarify the appropriate role of local government with respect to community planning noted:
"The values a community represents are spiritual as well as physical, aesthetic as well as monetary. It is within the power of the legislature to determine that the community be beautiful as well as healthy, spacious as well as clean, well balanced as well as carefully patrolled." (Berman vs. Parker -1954)

The Supreme Court subsequently commented further with respect to the right of a community in the preservation of residential areas:

"A quiet place where yards are wide, people few, and motor vehicles restricted are legitimate guidelines in a land use project addressed to family needs. The police power is not confined to the elimination of filth, stench and unhealthy places. It is ample to lay out zones where family values, youth values, and the blessings of quiet seclusion and clean air make the area a sanctuary for people." (Village of Belle Terre vs. Boraas 1974)

The 1990 Washington State Growth Management Act and subsequent court decisions have expanded on these basic land use concepts. In some cases, compliance with both the Growth Management Act and the spirit of the Supreme Court decisions referenced above is difficult. For example, a community with wide yards and few people may also be considered sprawling, low density development – in direct conflict with Goal 2 of the Growth Management Act. However, the two objectives are not mutually exclusive, and by carefully crafting the comprehensive plan to consider these and other elements, the community can have confidence that future land use – and the growth that it brings – will add to the unique sense of place of the community.

These are the type of issues that are at the core of the current effort to update and implement the Land Use Element of the City of Ferndale Comprehensive Plan.

Defining appropriate uses of land within the City of Ferndale UGA will facilitate long-term decisions by individuals and businesses. Clear land use definitions minimize costs associated with public services and preserve the qualities of life that make the area special to its citizens.

**BACKGROUND**

**Purpose of the Land Use Element**

The Land Use Element provides the means for achieving and maintaining a desirable balance of the use of land over a long period of time. Land use patterns determine the character of the City and the type and location of future development. They determine where people will live, shop, work and play. They determine traffic patterns and the...
ability to alter those patterns. They also affect the natural environment. In short, the Land Use Element can direct and define the quality of life in the City of Ferndale.

Continued growth and development is expected to profoundly alter the shape of the City of Ferndale. When the 1996 Comprehensive Plan was drafted, the population of Ferndale was approximately 6,830, and there were 2,514 housing units. In 2005, the population had increased to 9,750, and there were 3,476 housing units. The population of the City of Ferndale is expected to grow by 8,665 additional people, and 3,172 new housing units will be added to the City’s inventory over the next 20 years.

To accommodate this projected growth, the Land Use Element of the Comprehensive Plan provides a detailed overview of land uses in the City, identifies appropriate and beneficial land uses, and establishes goals and policies related to land use. It includes a map identifying the Urban Growth Area (UGA), and showing land use designations throughout the UGA. The Urban Growth Area includes land both with the City limits (the incorporated UGA), and outside the city limits (the unincorporated UGA). The Land Use Element provides the means for achieving and maintaining a desirable balance of the use of land over a long period of time. Land use patterns determine the character of the City and the type and location of future development. They determine where people will live, shop, work and play. They determine traffic patterns and the ability to alter those patterns. They also affect the natural environment. In short, the Land Use Element can direct and define the quality of life in the City of Ferndale.

The land use designations, which define allowable uses for each area of the City and limits on the density of development, must be implemented by amending the City’s Zoning Ordinance. Zoning classifications are more specific than land use designations, defining not only allowable uses and densities, but also such physical restrictions as building height limits and setback requirements and the process through which these requirements are reviewed and can be achieved.

The Land Use Element also addresses population and environmental considerations. It includes details on these issues and on the City’s existing land use. A summary is presented below, followed by a discussion on population and growth projections, and a land supply analysis. The chapter concludes with the land use goals and policies.

The Land Use Element is intended to serve as a roadmap for the city, guiding it through the 20 year planning period of the Comprehensive Plan, or until the year 2036. It serves as a basis for the city’s land development regulations and growth policies. In order to remain useful, this plan will require periodic updating as change continues to occur, and as required by the Growth Management Act.
The Land Use Element calls for the City to expand its existing infrastructure, encourage the retention of vacant developable commercial and industrial land, create more parks and recreational opportunities for its citizens and foster a vibrant downtown. It establishes a central core of pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use development, bringing together apartments, townhouses, single family residential, shopping, civic facilities, recreation and employment.

Under the Plan, residential areas within the City will accommodate a wide range of housing types and densities. They will consist predominantly of single family residential homes on lots ranging from 6,500 square feet to one acre. Some areas of medium-density single-family and multifamily development will assure an adequate supply of affordable housing.

Policies in the Land Use Element encourage redevelopment investment opportunities in both the downtown business district and along the Portal Way commercial corridor. Extension of infrastructure associated with the west side sewer interceptor project will continue to spur development in the western portion of the City.

Two planning periods are used throughout this Plan. They are:

- First planning period — the six-year planning horizon between 2007-2012
- Second planning period — the planning horizon out to 2025

Requirements of the Growth Management Act

When the State Legislature adopted the Growth Management Act (GMA), they found that "…a lack of common goals expressing the public's interest in the conservation and the wise use of our lands pose a threat to the environment, sustainable economic development, and the health, safety and high quality of life enjoyed by residents of this state. It is in the public interest that citizens, communities, local governments, and the private sector cooperate and coordinate with one another in comprehensive land use planning." [RCW 36.70A.010] This finding, which summarizes the intent of the GMA, emphasizes the central role of the Land Use Element.

The Act requires the Land Use Element to designate the general distribution, location, and extent of land for various land uses, including resource lands, housing, commerce, industry, parks and open space, and public facilities. [This element considers all these land uses, with the exception of public facilities, which is considered in detail within the Capital Facilities Element. The Land Use Element shall consider also considers population densities, building densities, and estimates of future population growth. It also shall provide for protection of the quality and quantity of groundwater used for public water supplies, and consider and mitigate the impacts of storm water runoff both in the immediate area and in surrounding jurisdictions.

Comment [JB10]: Can this be illustrated somehow, in a way that is meaningful to the reader? Comment [JB11]: The word “some” implies that this increased density is more of an after-thought.

Formatted: Highlight

Comment [JB13]: update

Comment [JB14]: This is the first section that I think could move down. If there was a breakout up at the beginning that would allow electronic readers to link to the requirements of the GMA, and hard copy readers to know that these requirements are towards the bottom of the element, I think it would help. As the reader goes through this element, and gets to the preceding section, they are introduced to some concepts that are pretty exciting (or, for the general reader marginally interesting). And then we get back into the mud with the requirements of the GMA. I think that the reader needs to know that there are requirements, but should assume that we’ve done our homework and that the element complies. The information would still be in the element, only down at the bottom.

Comment [JB15]: This paragraph should be amended. The Land Use Element is not necessarily the source of information on all of these other inputs (housing, commerce, public facilities, etc.) – but it is the element that ties them all together. In other words, as we are putting the other elements together/revising them, we will also be thinking about how those elements affect the land use plan, and vice-versa. The land use plan goals and policies are developed based on the aggregate conclusions of all of the other plans. For instance, an area that cannot be efficiently served with water and sewer is likely not an area where dense development is projected; same thing with areas that are inundated by wetlands.
Most importantly, however, the GMA requires that other elements of the Comprehensive Plan relate back to the Land Use Element. For example, the Act specifically requires both the Capital Facilities and Transportation Elements to be coordinated and consistent with the Land Use Element. It also states that the entire Comprehensive Plan shall be internally consistent, and that all elements shall be consistent with the Land Use Map. Additionally, the GMA requires that planning efforts for regional growth centers be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. Therefore, the GMA puts the Land Use Element in the central role of defining the direction of the Comprehensive Plan, and thereby defining the vision of the community.

The Land Use Element contains a variety of facts, analysis and other valuable information that together result in the primary policy outputs of the element - focus of the Land Use Element is the Goals and Policies and the Land Use Map. The goals and policies found in the Land Use Element are the product of both existing conditions and plans and policies which have previously been adopted.

Whatcom County-wide Planning Policies

The Whatcom County-wide Planning Policies are a further refinement of policy direction contained in the Growth Management Act, and are a result of a collaborative process between Whatcom County and the cities within the county. Ferndale’s policies are consistent with the County-wide policies, and vice-versa.

Policies contained herein have been prepared to implement the Policies as they apply to the City. The Whatcom County-wide Planning Policies provide a framework for both the county and its respective cities. Adherence to these policies ensures that plans within the county are consistent with one another. These policies address such issues as the designation of urban growth areas, land use, affordable housing, provision of urban services for future development, transportation, and contiguous and orderly development. The Policies have the most direct impact on land use policies in this chapter.

In addition to its County-wide Planning Policies, Whatcom County has created the concept of “Long Term Planning Areas” and “Short Term Planning Areas”, and has identified UGAs for each. Although there is no requirement in the Growth Management Act to identify and designate separate urban growth areas, the County has done so in an effort to identify those areas that have the potential to develop in a shorter period of time. Rather than identify short and long term UGAs, the City of Ferndale strongly encourages a cooperative collaborative effort with the County to adopt a program to pre-zone all lands within the Ferndale Urban Growth Area. This effort will reduce the potential for land to develop under existing county regulations that would then be non-conforming when it is annexed into the city. Exhibit LUE-2 identifies the long-term and short-term UGAs for the Ferndale area (Whatcom County Map #28-D).

Comment [JB16]: This is a good explanation, and perhaps this is the wording that should be up front – it not only explains that the land use element is the central element, but it tells why. The previous recitals of the importance of the element only said that it was important.

Comment [JB17]: These policies are also listed in the Introduction Element. In the electronic version of the comp plan (and possibly in all versions), it may be appropriate to simply place the Countywide policies in an appendix with a hyperlink from each of the elements that refer to them.

Comment [JB18]: Eliminate – Long term and short term areas no longer exist, City Annexation Blueprint takes its place.
While Whatcom County is responsible for establishing Urban Growth Areas, the City of Ferndale is responsible for expansions to the city limits through the annexation of the UGA. The City has adopted an Annexation Blueprint (or Annexation Phasing Plan) by reference to this element. The Blueprint identifies a general timeline for annexing subareas of the UGA and serves as a basis for planned capital improvements necessary to serve future development within the UGA.

The Whatcom County-wide Planning Policies are contained in Technical Appendix I.

### LAND USE DISTRIBUTION IN THE FERNDALE PLANNING AREA

#### Gross Land Area

In 2005-2016, the City of Ferndale covered approximately 3,447 acres, or 5.4 square miles. Unincorporated portions of the UGA contain approximately 3,238 acres, or 5.1 square miles. The total amount of land in the Ferndale Planning Area is 6,694 acres, or 10.5 square miles. Approximately 85% of the UGA abuts the city to the west and northwest. There is one additional larger portion of the UGA located east of Portal Way. The remaining portions of the UGA consist of isolated pockets abutting the city to the east and south, along the I-5 corridor. Exhibit LUE-1 illustrates the relationship between the incorporated city limits and the Ferndale Urban Growth Area. These lands, in addition to vacant lands located within the existing city limits, are anticipated to provide adequate area to accommodate anticipated future growth in the City over the 20-year planning period of the Comprehensive Plan.

Exhibit LUE-3 illustrates the gross land supply contained within the Ferndale city limits and the Ferndale UGA.

Comment [JB19]: Link to Blueprint here.

Comment [JB20]: Consider discussing UGA history here? Provisional UGA, 2011 changes, etc.?

Comment [JB21]: Imbed land supply table. Consider noting that the gross land supply does not evaluate the development potential of the underlying land, and includes such things as roads and other infrastructure, critical areas, schools and public land, more.
Placeholder for Exhibit LUE-1 [Map Showing Ferndale City Limits and UGA]
Placeholder for Exhibit LUE-2 [Whatcom County Map #28-D; Short-term and Long-term UGA Boundary]
EXHIBIT LUE-3
Gross Land Supply

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<th>City Limits</th>
<th>UGA</th>
<th>Total Land in Planning Area</th>
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<td>Ferndale Urban Growth Area</td>
<td>3,447 acres</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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Source: Whatcom County Buildable Lands Inventory for Ferndale, April 2005

Buildable Land Area

The Buildable Lands Inventory Land Capacity Analysis for Ferndale (April 2005) indicates that a total of 1,201 acres within the incorporated city and 1,670 acres within the unincorporated UGA are available for development. Overall, about 43% of all the land within the Ferndale UGA is buildable, with 35% of the land within the city limits being considered available for development. Exhibit LUE-4 illustrates the amount of land by land use designation that is available for development within the Ferndale city limits and the UGA.

Comment [JB22]: Previous language could suggest that 43% of all parcels was buildable. Possible discussion of issues resulting in a complete reliance on a land capacity analysis, and the potential to aggregate parcels together to create the impression of more buildable land/ reflection of the fact that there is a market factor put in place to take this into account.
EXHIBIT LUE-4
Buildable Land Supply

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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,201</td>
<td>1,670</td>
<td>2,871</td>
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Source: Whatcom County Buildable Lands Inventory for Ferndale, April 2005

Land Supply Analysis

An essential element of any land use planning program is an analysis of existing land supply and a determination of future land use requirements. This information is necessary to adequately assess the extent and direction of community growth and as an aid in establishing utility construction and annexation policies. The projection of future land use needs is generally a function of three factors: the number of new residents, the density at which new residential development will occur, and the extent and projected type of nonresidential development. The primary purpose of a land use plan is to show in a general way the most appropriate use of the land (i.e., housing, commerce, industry, open space) and, in the instance of residential use areas, an indication of the density (typically expressed in dwelling units per acre) proposed for the area.

Uncertainty with economic conditions, changes in housing or shopping trends, and other factors which affect growth makes accurate projections of future population for the City...
difficult. However, despite the potential inaccuracy, such projections are necessary to provide a basis for future planning of such items as water supplies, sewer treatment capacity, parks, streets, fire equipment and public buildings and facilities, and similar activities that require significant lead times. Two primary sources of information utilized in this Comprehensive Plan update are the population projections supplied by the Washington State Office of Financial Management to each county, which in turn allocates population growth to each city within the county, and the Buildable Lands Inventory Land Capacity Analysis, prepared for the City of Ferndale. The Land Use Element also needs to consider and implement measures to ensure that the quality of life is maintained and enhanced through a quality built environment, protection of the natural environment, and accommodation of desired and appropriate uses, facilities and services.

The location of new residential growth within the city is significant. While residential development has occurred primarily in the northwestern part of the City, there are major developments planned for land south of Mountain View Road in the southwestern quadrant of the City, and for lands located east of Interstate 5. The location of new commercial development has also recently shifted, from historically vacant land located near the downtown core area, within the Portal Way corridor and just east of the Nooksack River, to land east of and alongside the Interstate 5 corridor.

**Previous Land Supply Analysis**

During the preparation of the 1996 Comprehensive Plan, land located east of the city was left outside of the planning area because some residents of that area expressed strong preferences to retain their suburban lifestyle. During the UGA analysis process conducted at that time, the city identified other suitable areas for expansion and so excluded this area from its planning boundaries.

The UGA that existed from 1997 until 2011 was much larger than the current UGA, and included lands extending to Olson Road to the west, to the Nooksack River east of Portal Way, and several additional areas southwest and to the east of the City. The Whatcom County Council removed these areas, based on a revised Land Capacity Analysis that replaced the previous Buildable Lands Inventory.

In the future, if additional lands are needed for urban expansion, this area should be considered for inclusion within Ferndale’s Urban Growth Area.

The 2005 Comprehensive Plan identified land east of the City limits and within the “North Bellingham” neighborhood as an area of potential expansion in the future. Another area the City may consider for future urban expansion is an area located along Axton Road immediately east of the existing city limits. Much of the area extending approximately one mile eastward, one-half mile southward and three-fourths mile northward of Axton Road is built to urban densities, or receives urban levels of service.
The City is not projected to require additional land for residential purposes prior to 2036, and further expansion to this area is not contemplated at this time.

Lands located north and west of the city were included in the Urban Growth Area when it was established because of their proximity to city services and the development trends that have resulted in significant residential development in this vicinity, due in part to the exceptional views that are afforded in this area. These lands were removed from the UGA by the Whatcom County Council in 2011.

Additionally, lands near the Grandview interchange were included in the urban growth area based on their future potential to support commercial and industrial development, and because of a demonstrated need, under state planning guidelines, for additional commercial and industrial lands to accommodate the economic needs of Ferndale’s future. Existing county zoning in areas immediately adjacent to the city limits has already helped establish some development trends and created certain expectations of the property owners in that area. As the city needs additional lands for expansion, urban services may be extended into these areas relatively inexpensively, as these areas may be able to support more intense urban density. The City may also be required to provide services to the Grandview area if existing onsite septic systems fail and impact sensitive watersheds in this area.

Nearly two-thirds of the total land within the urban growth area is designated for residential purposes, with the remaining one-third being roughly equally divided between commercial and industrial land use.

FUTURE LAND USE NEEDS

Residential Lands

Residential land use consists of single-family and multifamily dwellings, including condominiums, manufactured housing, foster care facilities, group quarters and cooperative housing. Other land uses found within areas designated for residential use include roadways, schools, churches, parks and open space, planned unit developments and undeveloped platted lands.

Residential Land Supply

In order to estimate the amount of residential land that will be necessary to support future growth, the City and County first sought to determine a baseline measurement, based on previous (achieved) development. This baseline was arrived at through completion of a Land Capacity Analysis (LCA), which was used by Ferndale, Whatcom County, and the other local jurisdictions.
An analysis of historical residential land use data shows that development has occurred in the past at a development density of approximately 4 dwelling units per gross acre for low density residential development, 7 dwelling units per gross acre for medium density residential development, and 12 dwelling units per gross acre for high density residential development. These figures are also cited in the Buildable Lands Inventory (April 2005). Achieving these density figures are reasonable for calculating the absorption of unencumbered vacant lands; they may be difficult to achieve when considering development of lands classified as underdeveloped or re-developable. For planning purposes, densities for lands classified as underdeveloped or re-developable were assumed to be 50% of that for vacant land.

The Buildable Lands Inventory (BLI) LCA is a complete inventory of all lands classified by general land use categoryzone, located both within the incorporated city limits and within the unincorporated Urban Growth Area. The zoning data is then transferred to the respective land use categories. Exhibit LUE-4 on page 9 illustrates the amount of buildable land by land use category.

The LCA follows a process described by the Washington Administrative Code (cite), where undevelopable or already-developed land is removed from the gross land inventory, resulting in a calculation of "developable" acres. Table X illustrates this process.

TABLE X

As with any future analysis, a number of assumptions are included in the LCA. For the most part, these assumptions are based upon existing data contained within official City maps (wetlands, critical areas), or relevant comprehensive plan chapters (Parks, Capital Facilities, School District plans). After the combined area of vacant, underdeveloped and redevelopable land in the UGA was calculated, the critical areas were deducted from that total. Overall, about 43% of all land within the UGA is considered buildable. More specifically, approximately 35% of the land within the city limits is buildable, and 52% of the land located in the unincorporated UGA is considered buildable.

Based on projected growth rates provided by the Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM), the population of Ferndale is expected to grow by 8,665 over the
next 20 years, and approximately 3,172 additional housing units will be added to the city's housing inventory. Eighty-eight percent of all residential lands within the Ferndale UGA are currently identified for low density development, and 12% of all residential lands are identified for medium and high density residential development. Based on development at densities identified above, the projected residential housing capacity of the buildable residential land within the Ferndale city limits was estimated, and is shown Exhibit LUE-5.

**Exhibit LUE-5**

Residential Housing Capacity, Ferndale City Limits

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Density Residential</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>660</td>
<td>91</td>
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<td>609</td>
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<tr>
<td>High Density Residential</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>708</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL:</strong></td>
<td><strong>259</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,543</strong></td>
<td><strong>195</strong></td>
<td><strong>616</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,159</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Whatcom County Buildable Lands Inventory, April 2005

Within the Ferndale city limits, there is enough capacity to accommodate nearly 88% of the projected 20-year housing demand. It is important to note that these potential dwelling units are evenly distributed between the Low, Medium and High Density Residential land use categories. This would imply that while a significant portion of the projected population growth can be accommodated within the city limits, the majority of that housing could be higher density or multiple residential (attached) units. In this case, the rate of land consumption will be significantly less than projected.

Based on development at densities identified above, the projected residential housing capacity of the buildable residential land within the Ferndale UGA was estimated, and is shown in Exhibit LUE-6.

**Exhibit LUE-6**

Residential Housing Capacity, Ferndale UGA

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Density Residential</td>
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<tr>
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<td>45</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>708</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL:</strong></td>
<td><strong>794</strong></td>
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<td><strong>894</strong></td>
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<td><strong>5,697</strong></td>
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</table>

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Page 14
These estimates support the conclusion that Ferndale has enough residential land in its UGA to accommodate the projected population growth anticipated to occur over the next 20 years. In fact, the 20-year “supply” of potential dwelling units is nearly twice the population’s “demand” for dwelling units over the same 20-year period. It should be noted that the 2005 Comprehensive Plan estimated that the 20 year supply was nearly twice the projected demand for housing. Substantial reductions in the size of the unincorporated Urban Growth Area in 2011 reduced the much of the surplus capacity. Overall, the residential land supply is sufficient to accommodate the anticipated population growth well beyond the 20-year planning horizon of the Plan.

Commercial Lands

Commercial land uses support the daily retail and service needs of the region and community and can provide a basis for local employment. There are several commercial land use zones that have been designated to accommodate various commercial uses and districts. These zones are consistent with the Commercial Comprehensive Plan designation and are located on the Official Zoning Map available at City Hall and in Title 18 of the Ferndale Municipal Code. The commercial land use designations may include land to be used for retail and wholesale trade, offices, hotels, motels, restaurants, service outlets, automobile service stations and repair facilities, and similar uses. These uses are more specifically described in separate commercial zoning districts within the zoning ordinance. In an effort to support community character and to realize economic development objectives, sub-area plans may be prepared in the future to address specific commercial areas, such as the downtown business district. Second story multi-family residential uses may be appropriate within some commercial land use designations. Small-scale commercial and service uses which preserve and enhance the existing character of residential districts may also be provided on or near arterial intersections.

There are 512 acres of vacant buildable commercial land in the city limits and 42 acres of vacant buildable commercial land in the UGA.

Industrial Lands

The City’s proximity to the major transportation routes of Interstate 5 and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad makes Ferndale a convenient location for industrial uses. Such uses provide a basis for local employment and contribute to the local tax base. The Land Use Element identifies two land use designations to accommodate industrial land uses, the Light Industrial and Manufacturing classifications. These categories permit land to be used for manufacturing, processing, warehousing, storage, and related uses. Future heavy industrial uses are intended to be accommodated on lands located adjacent to the BNSF Railroad.
There are 235 acres of vacant buildable industrial land in the city limits and 364 acres of vacant buildable industrial land in the UGA.

**Commercial and Industrial Land Supply**

The Growth Management Act mandates that cities and counties look at future population growth to determine the need for land to accommodate future growth and development. Primarily, that focus is on determining residential land supply since it can be directly related to the increase in population.

It is also necessary for cities to have adequate lands to accommodate commercial and industrial growth as well. Unfortunately, estimating how much commercial and industrial land a community needs is not as clear-cut as with residential land.

In particular, commercial land uses tend to gravitate towards one another, often creating commercial centers that draw customers from a wider geographic region. The presence or absence of a commercial center may dictate the amount of land necessary to serve future commercial growth – and may vary substantially between cities of equal size.

Based on various land analyses conducted in the mid-1990s, the 1996 Comprehensive Plan included statements that the amount of commercial and industrial land provided for in the Plan was probably inadequate. Given this previous assessment, it may very well be necessary for the City to designate additional land for commercial and industrial development during this Comprehensive Plan Update, and certainly as a function during the preparation of the ‘20/20’ Plan. Conversely, it would seem inappropriate for the City to take any action that would have the effect of reducing the commercial and industrial land supply until further technical analysis can be accomplished.

Both the 1996 and 2005 Comprehensive Plans suggested that the City’s inventory of commercial and industrial land was inadequate. Since that time the City’s inventory of land has shrunk due to development, the removal of lands from the UGA, and more-restrictive environmental protections.

Despite these reductions, the 2016 Comprehensive Plan update cannot conclude that additional commercial or industrial land will be necessary during the planning period. As described above, the amount of land necessary for future industrial and commercial development can vary substantially, and the City cannot rely on historic trends to dictate the magnitude or type of future development. For example, the 1996 Comprehensive Plan Update was written in an era when regional malls were beginning to be supplanted by large-format retail stores, or “big box” stores. The 2005 plan was written prior to the 2008-2010 economic recession, and prior to the decline of some brick and mortar stores, or the dramatic increase in internet sales. If each of the two preceding plans...
were written to reflect current development trends, they were both outdated within five years of their adoption.

Based on historic shares of commercial and industrial growth, it would appear that Ferndale will not need additional commercial or industrial lands within the twenty-year planning period. However, in order to plan for the next twenty years the 2016 plan cannot rely exclusively on current trends to project development in 2036.

The City of Ferndale believes that the Urban Growth Area will need to be expanded within the next twenty years in order to accommodate future commercial and industrial growth, if development trends shift towards Ferndale. The City cannot assume that a super-majority of commercial business development will continue to occur within the City of Bellingham – the combination of relatively short lifespans for retail businesses, the lack of available land within the Bellingham Urban Growth Area that is adjacent to transportation corridors, and the shifting of Whatcom County's center of population northward (towards Ferndale) all contribute to the likelihood that Ferndale will experience more than its share of commercial and industrial growth in the future.

No additional expansion of the UGA is proposed during this Comprehensive Plan Update, but future updates or amendments may require expansion based on trends that may develop during the planning period.

EXISTING LAND USE PATTERNS

The existing land use patterns in the City of Ferndale and surrounding area are greatly influenced by the physical features that provide both opportunities and constraints for the development of the area. The Nooksack River flows through the city dividing it along a north-south orientation. Manmade features such as the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad and Interstate 5 further divide the city along a similar axis.

Neighborhood Planning Areas

The neighborhood, or sub-area planning process, is an integral part of Growth Management Act (GMA) planning. A sub-area plan is a special study of an area within a larger planning jurisdiction. The sub-area is usually a neighborhood, an unincorporated urban area, or some other area that has special needs due to growth pressures. A sub-area plan is usually part of the comprehensive plan of a jurisdiction. It could also be a plan adopted by multiple jurisdictions as a guide for dealing with future...
growth in the sub-area. Sub-area plans provide details on types and locations of land uses planned for neighborhood areas and urban centers, provide opportunities for a variety of residential densities, coordinate infrastructure improvements with planned uses and centers, and identify and preserve natural features, open space and critical areas.

During the preparation of the 1996 Comprehensive Plan, the City of Ferndale and its UGA were categorized into six sub-areas, or neighborhood areas. They are as follows:

Sub-Area Number 1: Northwest Ferndale Neighborhood

The largest sub-area in the Ferndale Study area in size, Northwest Ferndale includes all the lands north of Mountain View Road, east of Olson Road, South of Aldergrove Road and west of the Burlington Northern Railroad. Divided roughly equally between incorporated and unincorporated lands, the area is characterized by single-family residential development. Virtually all of the single family residential growth that has occurred within Ferndale over the past 30 years has occurred within this area. Generally, the newest subdivisions are located near the western and northern boundaries of the city, with older, well-established neighborhoods located along the southern and eastern quadrant of the sub-area. Some multi-family development is located along the southern boundary of the sub-area, near Mountain View Road and along the Washington Street corridor. Commercial development is limited to some office uses located in close proximity to existing multi-family development and retail commercial uses along the extreme southeast corner of the sub-area, adjacent to the downtown area, although additional neighborhood commercial development may be provided at certain arterial intersections. Some industrial land uses are also located along the corridor immediately west of the Burlington Northern Railroad. Public uses include five school sites, four neighborhood park sites, a public library and the city maintenance shop.

Land uses in the unincorporated northern and western portions of the sub-area include numerous large lot residences, vacant land, and agricultural uses. Much of this area is characterized by rolling hills and includes numerous small drainages.

Sub-Area Number 2: Southwest Ferndale Neighborhood (Main Street)

This sub-area is located south of Mountain View Road and west of the Nooksack River. It consists primarily of the downtown business district and contains the original Ferndale town site. The downtown area is the central business district and contains the majority of Ferndale's commercial enterprises. The downtown area also contains many of the City’s public facilities, including the city hall, the city hall annex and the police department. Residential development located within this sub-area includes multi-family residential complexes located in and around the downtown core and single family residences located primarily in two areas: south of Main Street and east of the Burlington Northern Railroad. These two areas represent the largest concentration of
older housing stock in the Ferndale area. Industrial uses include Ferndale Grain, located adjacent to the railroad. Public uses include an elementary school, the post office, city hall, and two city-wide parks. The western portion of this sub-area consists primarily of unincorporated land that is characterized by scattered single-family residences on large lots, some agricultural lands and vacant properties. Some more intense uses are located on properties immediately adjacent to the city limits, including a mobile home park and some apartment complexes.

Sub-Area Number 3: Northeast Ferndale Neighborhood (Portal Way)

This sub-area is bounded by the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad tracks on the west, the Nooksack River along the southeast and extends past Trigg Road to the north. Portal Way runs through the sub-area, parallel to I-5 and was a part of Highway 99 prior to the construction of the interstate. Existing development along this corridor consists of a broad range of land uses that includes single family residences, apartments, mobile home parks, offices, retail commercial and industrial. Notably, the former Simplot food processing operation lies largely unused on property located adjacent to I-5, at the south boundary of the sub-area. Much of the more recent development in this area has been of a commercial nature, as new residential uses have tended to gravitate to areas further removed from Portal Way. Much of the land located in the eastern portion of the sub-area is unincorporated and is undeveloped. Agricultural uses and scattered single-family residential development are also present in this area. There are no existing public facilities in this sub-area.

Sub-Area Number 4: Southeast Ferndale Neighborhood

This sub-area is comprised of all lands located within the Ferndale study area that are located east of Interstate 5. The majority of this land is undeveloped. Much of the development located along the northern highway frontage road, Barrett Road, has been retail commercial. Development along the southern frontage road, Pacific Highway, has been light industrial in nature. Some single family residential development has occurred along both Smith and Axton Roads in the easternmost portions of the sub-area. No public facilities are located in this sub-area.

Sub-Area Number 5: South Ferndale Neighborhood (LaBounty Road)

This sub-area is bounded by the Nooksack River on the North, Interstate 5 on the East, and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad on the west and extends past Slater Road to the section line on the south. It also includes parcels located west of the railroad tracks in Section 29. The most prevalent land use in this area is industry. A number of large industrial uses are present in this area including Sauder Wood Products, Swarne Lumber, ReComp, and Ferndale Ready Mix. Other land uses in the sub-area include retail commercial uses located along the Main Street corridor in the northern portion of the area, single family and duplex residential units located along LaBounty Road and Rural Avenue and the area’s only golf course located adjacent to
the Nooksack River at the extreme north boundary of the sub-area. Much of the land is undeveloped, with a high percentage of the vacant land being impacted by wetland constraints. There are currently no public facilities located within this sub-area.

Sub-Area Number 6: Grandview Area Neighborhood

The northern most portion of the Ferndale Study area, this area is a major transportation interface with the intersection of I-5, the railroad, and Grandview Road (a major access to Cherry Point). State and federal public policy require that considerable attention be given to preserving these kinds of areas for commercial and industrial uses, especially in border areas where the national interest is served by providing intermodal opportunities. This sub-area is comprised almost entirely of unincorporated properties adjacent to Interstate 5 and the Grandview interchange. The Burlington Northern Railroad runs west of and roughly parallel to the freeway in this area. The majority of the sub-area is undeveloped and underdeveloped properties with the predominant land use being light industrial. The Grandview Light Industrial Park and the Northgate Industrial Park are located in this sub-area. Also interspersed throughout the area are scattered large lot single family residences and pasture lands. Commercial uses consist of a mini-mart/gas station located at the intersection of Grandview Road and Portal Way. Public uses in the vicinity are limited to a small, unmanned fire station located at the extreme northeast corner of the sub-area.

Specific neighborhood plans typically include a more detailed review of each sub-area, or neighborhood. A neighborhood plan considers connections, balanced land use mix, and access between neighborhoods and the region. Environment, land uses, housing type mix, densities, transportation features, parks and recreation features, public services and facilities, walkability, and aesthetics are considered to develop a future action plan to accomplish the goals and policies of the comprehensive plan. A more detailed sub-area or neighborhood planning process is envisioned as part of the development of the future ‘20/20’ Plan.

LAND USE UNDER THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Comprehensive Plan land use map [Exhibit LUE-7] defines the location of the UGA and establishes how land is to be used for development throughout the UGA. The Plan defines categories of land uses and permitted densities. The land use designations of the Comprehensive Plan provide adequate land capacity within the existing city limits and UGA to accommodate projected growth to the year 2025. The UGA contains 3,238 gross acres of land, of which 1,670 acres are vacant and developable (net buildable) (BLI, April 2005). The acreage devoted to each land use is summarized, beginning on page 19.
Placeholder for Exhibit LUE-7 [Comprehensive Plan Map]
Land Use Distribution

Land use designations identified in the Plan are as follows:

- Commercial — This category includes a variety of retail, wholesale and office uses. The Commercial designation is composed of four distinct categories of commercial development, each of which shall be defined by a range of uses, design standards, and locations, and shall be defined by specific zones as described in the City’s Municipal Code. The four categories are:
  - Neighborhood-Oriented Commercial: commercial activities intended to serve the area within the immediate vicinity of the development.
  - Ferndale-Oriented Commercial: commercial activities intended primarily to serve the Ferndale community in general, including all areas within the Ferndale City Limits, the surrounding area, and Whatcom County.
  - Entryway-Oriented Commercial: commercial activities intended to serve the traveling public at or around major transportation corridors that serve as entrypoints to the community.
  - Regional-Oriented Commercial: commercial activities that may draw from a broader geographic area beyond Whatcom County.

- Industrial — This category includes a variety of light and heavy industrial, assembly, warehousing, distribution and manufacturing land uses. It also includes uses devoted to the sale of retail and wholesale of products manufactured on the site.

- Low Density Residential — The low density residential category includes single-family residential uses that range in density from three to seven dwelling units per gross acre, with an average density of 5 units per gross acre. The low density residential designation is further delineated into five zoning districts which provide the ability to develop at a wide range of densities and maintain a suitable living environment for low density single family residential uses.

- Medium Density Residential — The medium density residential category includes single-family and multi-family residential uses that range in density from seven to twelve dwelling units per gross acre. Land consumption calculations utilized in this document assume development at an average density of 7 units per gross acre. The medium density designation is intended to provide for multi-family living to ensure that opportunities to obtain reasonable-cost housing exist for community residents. Primary uses include multi-family housing of various types including duplexes, townhouses, condominiums, apartments, etc. Secondary uses can include single-family dwellings, adult family homes, day care, public and private educational facilities, utilities subject to compatibility.
criteria, churches and religious institutions, convalescent care and rest homes, limited office/professional buildings, and manufactured home subdivisions.

- **High Density Residential** — The high density residential category includes single and multi-family residential uses that exceed twelve dwelling units per gross acre. Land consumption calculations utilized in this document assume development at an average density of 12 units per gross acre. This land use category is designed to provide a wide range of housing choices in areas with existing and planned infrastructure, and to allow for infill development and the reduction of sprawl. Primary uses include multi-family housing of various and moderate density residential developments, adult family homes, day care, public and private educational facilities, utilities subject to compatibility criteria, churches and religious institutions, convalescent care and rest homes. This designation primarily applies to existing development that already is developed to this density level. This designation may be applied in new areas as appropriate to the neighborhood’s character (e.g. near commercial areas).

- **Floodway** — This category includes those certain lands subject to periodic inundation by flooding and includes lands that are designated as “floodway” by the US Army Corps of Engineers Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and such contiguous areas found by the City Council to warrant protection from habitable development.

- **Public Use** — This category includes public or quasi-public land uses that provide essential services and recreation opportunities to the general public. The land use designation has three primary components:

  - **Public Facilities** — includes existing or planned public or quasi-public land uses that provide essential services to the general public, which may include services such as city hall, police and fire stations, libraries, public transportation including bus, rail, as public uses intended to support the public works infrastructure, including water and sewer treatment, the public works shop, pump stations, and other similar uses.

  - **Developed Open Space** — includes lands that provide facilities to meet the City’s active recreational needs. These areas are characterized by a variety of existing or planned improvements that include playgrounds, sports fields, swimming pools, public parks, and other facilities that will accommodate the City's recreational programs.
• Natural Open Space - identifies areas in the City that are not appropriate for development of any type, along with developable areas that are to be preserved for passive recreational opportunities, but may also include offsite wetland mitigation and mitigation banks. Natural Open Space areas are to be minimally improved, and all improvements should be carefully designed so as to subtly compliment the natural atmosphere that should prevail. Facilities that may be included in Natural Open Space areas should include hiking trails, equestrian trails, boardwalks, observatories, educational kiosks and other elements that promote an awareness or appreciation of the City's history and natural setting.

EXISTING ZONING

The city zoning regulations have worked to establish and expand land use trends in the community. Generally speaking, commercial zoning is in place along the Main Street corridor and properties adjoining the freeway. Industrial zoning is located adjacent to the railroad, along parcels fronting the freeway and near arterial streets and residential zoning is in place on the remaining portions of the city. Specific zone locations and their description are found in the Ferndale Municipal Code.

Comment [JB47]: Are equestrian trails compatible with urban development?
Within the Incorporated City Limits

Key zoning features within the Ferndale city limits are as follows:

- **Residential zoning** applies to the largest portion of the incorporated area, or approximately 52.4 percent (1,826 acres) of the total City's land area. Of this amount, 63.6 percent (1,161 acres) is designated for low density residential uses; 15.8 percent (288 acres) is designated for medium density residential uses, and 13.7 percent (250 acres) is designated for high-density residential uses. An additional 121 acres of residentially-zoned land is within the RO, Residential-Office zoning classification.

- Lands designated within the City's three commercial zoning categories represent approximately 26.4 percent (921 acres) of the City's total land area.

- Industrial lands represent approximately 13.7 percent (478 acres) of the City's total land area.

- Lands designated for floodway purposes and open space occupy 7.4 percent (259 acres) of the City's total land area.

Within the Ferndale Urban Growth Area

There are approximately 3,238 gross acres of land within the unincorporated UGA, or approximately 5.1 square miles. Key zoning features of land within the unincorporated UGA are as follows:

- **Agriculture.** Lands designated for agricultural uses constitute 4.2 percent (145 acres) of the unincorporated UGA. These lands are located in Section 30 and are designated as Residential – Unspecified in the Ferndale Comprehensive Plan.

- **UR3.** Lands designated UR3 (Residential) constitute 53.1 percent (1,856 acres) of the unincorporated UGA. These lands are principally located west of the Ferndale city limits, with two smaller pockets near Slater Road in the south and east of Portal Way and north of Trigg Road in northeast Ferndale. These lands are designated by Whatcom County to promote an orderly transition from rural to urban development, and to encourage land uses and associated densities which will be complementary with future urban densities and services, and to provide the opportunity for the development of building sites which will maximize the efficient use of both energy and land by allowing an option for clustering of residential lots.

- **R5A.** Lands designated R5A (Residential) constitute 23.3 percent (815 acres) of the unincorporated UGA. These lands lie generally adjacent to and northeast of
the Ferndale city limits. These lands are designated by Whatcom County to maintain the rural character and environmentally fragile areas by allowing a variety of low intensity uses that are compatible and complementary with the conservation of agricultural, forestry and related uses, and to provide the option for residential uses to arrange in cluster development patterns while reserving tracts of land for rural uses and potential future re-subdivision.

- **GC.** Lands designated for General Commercial uses comprise 3.2 percent (112 acres) of the unincorporated UGA. There are two pockets of GC land in the Ferndale UGA, both located adjacent to the freeway interchanges at Slater Road and Grandview Road. These lands are designated by Whatcom County to accommodate the siting of commercial uses which serve the surrounding community with a broad range of retail goods and services.

- **TC.** Lands designated for Tourist Commercial activities comprise 0.14 percent (4.8 acres) of the unincorporated UGA. The immediate southwest corner of the I-5 and Grandview Road interchange is the only area designated TC. These lands are designated by Whatcom County to supply sufficient areas arranged in a concentrated form that would allow land use activities which serve the traveling public.

- **LII.** Lands designated for Light Impact Industrial uses comprise 16.1 percent (562 acres) of the unincorporated UGA. These lands are located near the Slater Road interchange and in the Grandview Area Neighborhood (Sub-area #6). These lands are designated by Whatcom County for industrial and subordinate uses which provide support services. Allowable uses include light industrial uses that are primarily related to services, and distribution, manufacture and assembly of finished products that have a relatively light impact on adjacent uses and districts, and also to accommodate limited commercial uses that are incompatible with other commercial uses.

### EXISTING DEFICIENCIES IN LAND USE PATTERNS

The Comprehensive Plan encourages the economical use of existing municipal services and discourages expansion of the UGA during the two planning periods. It does not anticipate the expansion of the UGA beyond designated Urban Reserve areas prior to 2036. The plan encourages the retention of existing designated commercial and industrial land and further encourages a wide variety of commercial and industrial development to provide a healthy tax base to sustain a high level of municipal services and to provide family-wage jobs for residents of Ferndale. The Plan also encourages the retention of its commercial and industrial land, and promotes diversification of the commercial and industrial base to accommodate new growth and economic development in the city.
No existing deficiencies in land use patterns were identified because the City of Ferndale has adequate capacity to accommodate projected growth within the existing UGA. Land use goals and policies in the Comprehensive Plan will help reduce the potential for impact from changes in the City’s land use and development pattern. The Comprehensive Plan encourages new development adjacent to existing development in the city that takes advantages of the existing infrastructure.

POPULATION FORECASTS

The following analysis of population and land use analysis is based on an inventory by Traffic Analysis Zone (TAZ) of developed and vacant land available for future development, and a compilation by land use designation of developed, underdeveloped, re-developable and vacant land. The results were used to identify the capacity for additional population on vacant residential land. Residential capacity is discussed in detail in the Housing Element.

Goals and policies concerning population growth focus on the promotion of contiguous and orderly development and the provision of urban services to such development. The Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA) requires the Land Use Element to include population densities and estimates of future growth [RCW 36.70A.070(1)]. The Whatcom County-wide Planning Policies contain several provisions addressing population growth and capacity. They include require agreement or cooperation in determining the following:

- The portion of the 20-year population forecast allocated to the City of Ferndale
- The boundaries of the urban growth area
- The amount of land necessary to provide sufficient service capacity to meet projected populations at urban densities and service standards
- Consistency with the Whatcom County-wide Planning Policies.

As mandated by the GMA, the OFM provided population estimates for Whatcom County through 2036, allocated among the county’s cities and unincorporated areas. However, the OFM does not provide population projections for individual cities. Whatcom County is responsible for these individual population allocations. The official OFM population projection for Ferndale for the year 2022 is 17,322. The Plan Update is using a year 2025 population estimate of 18,415. (BLI, April 2005)

Overall, Whatcom County’s rate of growth is expected to slow over the planning period. This results in overall population projections that are at or lower than previous projections. For example, the 1996 Comprehensive Plan anticipated that Ferndale’s 2016 population would be over 20,000. The 2016 Comprehensive Plan projects that the 2036 population would be less than 20,000.
Whatcom County projects that Ferndale will grow by an average growth rate of 1.9% over the course of the planning period. This is significantly less than the 2.9% annual growth rate from 1990-2010 and reflects the slower population growth projected by OFM.

While the overall growth is expected to slow, Ferndale’s share of overall County growth is projected to increase from 7.1% of all County growth to 9.1% of the total growth. This means that while Ferndale’s population is expected to grow more slowly in the past, it will continue to grow more quickly than other jurisdictions.

Population projections for the Ferndale Urban Growth Area that are contained in the 1996 Comprehensive Plan were developed in coordination with Whatcom County and are based on a population study undertaken jointly by Whatcom County and the City of Bellingham (Property Counselors Report on Population, Economic and Housing Projections, Oct. 1991). Projections generated by the Washington State Office of Financial Management were also considered. For the 2005 Comprehensive Plan Update, population growth has been forecast at an annual rate ranging from 2.02% to 3.14% over the 20-year planning period of the Comprehensive Plan. The high rate of growth is partially explained by the rapid growth that is predicted for all of Whatcom County. As was the case in the 1996 and 2005 comprehensive plan updates, however, there are other several factors that help to explain the population forecasts. Among them, Ferndale’s proximity to Bellingham, the Cherry Point Industrial area and Interstate 5 make the city an especially attractive residential community for many people who live in the city and commute to other parts of the county for employment.

Land Supply and Capacity for Population

The Housing Element includes an assessment of whether the UGA has enough developable residential land to accommodate the projected population increase. Population growth can affect other elements in the Comprehensive Plan, such as the city’s housing supply and transportation system, and the provision of capital facilities and utilities. Those impacts are addressed in the corresponding elements of the Comprehensive Plan.

The CTED Publication, “Issues in Designing Urban Growth Areas,” suggest in instances where the City is unable to monitor the land supply on a frequent basis, it is appropriate to build a “market factor” or “safety factor” to ensure that an adequate land supply always remains available within the growth area. Recent Growth Management Hearings Board cases suggest that it is appropriate for cities to set aside more land than what is strictly needed for growth to ensure that a supply of undeveloped land is available for development, thus helping to keep land prices from becoming artificially inflated. However, any figure greater than 25% is subject to challenge by the Growth Hearings Board.
The unincorporated UGA contains 3,238 acres, or 48.6% of the total land within the Ferndale Urban Growth Area. Of this amount, 48% is constrained by critical areas and is therefore assumed to be undevelopable. A total of 1,670 acres are available for development, which represents 52% of the total unincorporated land within the UGA. This amount of vacant and readily available land for development is sufficient to accommodate the projected population growth anticipated to occur within the 20-year planning horizon of the Comprehensive Plan.

Future Deficiencies

The Ferndale Urban Growth Area (UGA) boundary will not be recommended for expansion during this Comprehensive Plan Update. Implementation of the Plan presents no deficiencies for population capacity.

FUTURE COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL LAND DEMAND

In addition to planning to accommodate the residential growth anticipated in the future, the City must plan proactively to ensure there are jobs and services for the citizens in the future. Unlike residential land demand and population forecasts, the amount of land needed for future commercial and industrial purposes is more difficult to estimate. Most of Ferndale’s current residents are employed outside the city limits, with Bellingham and the Cherry Point Industrial Area drawing most of the employee related traffic. Additionally, many residents depend upon Bellingham and other parts of Whatcom County to satisfy their shopping needs. As the City continues to grow, more commercial development is anticipated, allowing Ferndale residents more varied options to satisfy their demands for commercial services without having to leave the city. The city’s proximity to Interstate 5 can provide for convenient access to commercial developments for county residents. Because of Ferndale’s strategic location in Whatcom County, its location adjacent to the interstate freeway, and its proximity to rail lines, the city is already starting to attract commercial and industrial development that is more regional in character. Additionally, many commercial and industrial interests are also seeking larger tracts of land to develop that are no longer available within the Bellingham area. This trend will undoubtedly continue into the foreseeable future.

One simple method of estimating commercial and industrial land demand is to translate the projected increase in population to jobs, and then use the jobs figure to estimate the amount of commercial and industrial floor area that would be needed to accommodate those new jobs (number of employees). This is a very crude method of estimating commercial and industrial land supply, and it assumes that the amount of commercial and industrial development is directly related to population increase. This assumption is simply not applicable to the City of Ferndale.

The natural consequence of this trend is that Ferndale’s commercial and industrial land base must be large enough to accommodate commercial and industrial growth that...
exceeds the immediate needs of its population. The Whatcom County-wide Planning Policies encourage economic development that provides jobs to county residents and that pay family-wages. The Policies also support industrial land designations sufficient to permit the concentration of industry in appropriate locations beyond 20 years. When designating areas that are appropriate for future commercial and industrial development, the Policies require the adequacy of transportation corridors, public transportation, impacts on the environment and the availability of the area to provide urban services be considered. In effect, the Policies encourage the notion of providing regional employment centers that provide economic development opportunities countywide.

Approximately one-third of all land within the Ferndale UGA is designated for commercial and industrial uses. According to the Buildable Lands Inventory conducted in April 2005, there are 1,060 acres of commercially-designated land, and 1,050 acres of industrial land within the UGA. Of this amount, there are 554 acres of vacant commercial land, or about 52 percent of the total commercial land inventory, available for future development. There are 599 acres of vacant industrial land, or about 57 percent of the total industrial land inventory, available for development. Based on the land demand analysis completed by ECONorthwest in May 2002, the City will need approximately 60 net new acres for future non-residential development in the next 20 years. While the City’s supply greatly exceeds the demand projected by ECONorthwest, it is in keeping with Ferndale’s regional character in Whatcom County. Because of its unique location, Ferndale is expected to continue to be a major employment center along the I-5 corridor, and the City needs to ensure land and infrastructure are adequate to meet future employment needs. In looking toward the future, the City will be actively pursuing ways to increase the number of other types of employment within the City to help balance the economy and provide better paying jobs to the residents of the community. The first step in accomplishing that goal is to ensure an adequate land supply for future commercial and industrial development. As an example, policies maintaining a ratio of at least one acre of commercial and industrial property for every three acres of residentially zoned is one way the City is working to achieve these goals.

In adding only 60 net new acres of commercial and industrial lands to its inventory, the City recognizes it may find itself short of both in coming years. At the same time, the high quality of the lands being added at the Slater Road and Grandview interchanges to I-5 may help compensate for the lack of quantity. Additionally, some lands currently zoned for commercial and industrial purposes are only partially developed and could potentially be re-developed with more intense uses. Although the UGA will not be altered during this Plan Update, the City recognizes that it may need to take action to adjust its Urban Growth Area in the future in order to maintain an adequate supply of commercial and industrial land. To forestall that need, the City will strive to provide an adequate supply of commercial and industrial properties and will work with the development community to provide services when development is ready to occur.
While unlikely, based on state recommended studies of need, the areas designated as suitable for industrial development may represent a land supply greater than what the City would require over the 20-year planning period, if past trends continue and a market or safety factor is discounted. However, the additional acreage designated for industrial uses may attract industry at a greater rate than what the City needs to serve its buildout population. Whatcom County has a limited supply of fully serviced industrial property. Ferndale may be in a position to satisfy some of the demand for regional industrial development that might otherwise be developed in the unincorporated portions of Whatcom County. This scenario would be consistent with the overall goal of growth management planning that identifies cities as providers of urban level services and counties as providers of rural and regional level services.

INFILL POTENTIAL

Infill is defined as the development of new housing or other buildings on scattered vacant or underdeveloped sites within a built-up area. Infill development is a planning tool that assists in the development of underdevelopment properties, or in assisting with redevelopment activities. Infill is used to combat sprawl and to assist communities to meet the urban density requirements of the GMA. Infill development is also a method to provide housing choices. For example, infill development may provide housing for elderly parents, allowing them to stay in their own neighborhood. It may, over time, also ensure that mass transit service is viable. The Whatcom County-wide Planning Policies encourages cities to provide incentives for infill development. Methods to implement infill development are discussed in more detail in the Housing Element.

The development potential of vacant or undeveloped property was determined by making a number of assumptions regarding the percentage of vacant land that would actually be available for development. Some property will be needed for future rights-of-way, public schools, parks and other facilities. Other vacant land will not be able to accommodate development because of environmental constraints such as wetlands, stream corridors, and floodplains. Some property owners will choose to develop their property at a lesser density than the maximum density allowed under existing zoning. Still other properties may be encumbered by multiple ownership interests that make assembly difficult. By taking these factors into consideration, a realistic assessment of infill potential can be generated.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSTRAINTS

The physical characteristics of the area provide both opportunities and constraints to development. One of the first growth management planning activities undertaken by the City was an inventory of critical areas and the constraints they place on development. The constraints to development identified were classified as wetlands, flood plains, stream corridors, aquifer recharge areas, seismic areas, and areas of landslide hazards.
Exhibits LUE 10 thru LUE 16 identify generalized locations of these areas that are presently known.

Growth and development activities impact the environment to some degree. Population and employment will increase over time, and additional population growth will increase the demand for housing. Secondary indirect impacts of growth would likely include potential encroachment near natural environmental resources, increases in demand for facilities, infrastructure, and cause other effects. The level of environmental analysis is programmatic in nature, focusing on potential impact resulting from Plan implementation. Additional environmental review of future development activities will be handled project-by-project as the City receives development applications.

Some measures taken by the City of Ferndale to address environmental issues are briefly described, below.

**Critical Areas**

The City’s Critical Areas Ordinance (Title 16) contains standards, guidelines, criteria and requirements identify, analyze and mitigate probable impacts on the City's critical areas, and to enhance and restore when possible. In appropriate circumstances, impacts on critical areas resulting from regulated activities may be minimized, rectified, reduced, or compensated for, consistent with the requirements of the ordinance.

**Shoreline Management**

The Shoreline Management Act requires the development of a Shoreline Master Plan (SMP) and gives local government primary authority over shoreline development within their jurisdiction. The primary purpose of the Ferndale Shoreline Management Program (Title 3) is to protect and sustain the limited shoreline resources for the enjoyment of Ferndale citizens and visitors.

**Stormwater Runoff and Erosion Control**

The City of Ferndale has adopted the Washington State Department of Ecology’s Stormwater Management Manual for Western Washington to address stormwater runoff and drainage issues. Stormwater issues are more fully addressed within Chapter V, the Utilities Element.

Comment [JB57]: [Capital Facilities: utilities, in the context of the GMA, are generally “dry” utilities – electricity, cable, fiber, etc.]

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CITY OF FERNDALE PLANNING COMMISSION  
SEPTEMBER 10, 2014

LAND USE ELEMENT WORKSHOP  PRESENTED BY JORI BURNETT
Placeholder for Exhibit LUE-10 [Wetlands]
Placeholder for Exhibit LUE-11 [100-year Flood Boundary]
Placeholder for Exhibit LUE-12 [Priority Habitat, Streams]
Placeholder for Exhibit LUE-13 [Aquifers]
Placeholder for Exhibit LUE-14 [Seismic Hazards]
Placeholder for Exhibit LUE-15 [Volcanic Hazards]
Placeholder for Exhibit LUE-16 [Landslide Hazards, Geologically Unstable Areas]
LAND USE GOALS AND POLICIES

Overall Land Use Goal:
The City of Ferndale strives to provide a healthy balance of residential, commercial, and industrial land uses to ensure the sustainability, financial well-being and quality of life enjoyed by the residents of Ferndale.

Commercial Land Use Goal

I. The City will promote commercial growth and revitalization that serves residents and strengthens and expands the tax base.

Rationale:
Expanding retail trade within the City provides an important source of revenue that will enable the City to provide the public infrastructure and services required by a growing community. As residents spend more of their retail dollars within the community, those dollars will be reinvested, further benefiting the local economy. Revitalization of the downtown area will encourage the expansion of existing businesses and the development of new businesses that will help to achieve the goal of retail trade expansion. Other benefits of revitalization include improved aesthetics in the downtown area that will increase the importance of downtown as a vital, active community center that provides the City with a sense of place and community pride. Revitalization of the downtown is only a portion of the picture. The commercial areas located near the freeway rely on the traveling public and have different needs than downtown merchants. The City’s development regulations need to recognize these differing needs in order to effectively support and benefit both types of commercial areas.

Commercial Land Use Policies

A. Support efforts to revitalize the downtown area undertaken by the Main Street Organization and/or other civic groups.
   i. Support private efforts to develop guidelines for the renovation/rehabilitation of downtown buildings.
   ii. Develop policies to encourage public improvements such as street lighting, landscaping, park benches, and similar facilities in the downtown area that are compatible with the efforts of the Main Street Organization and/or other civic groups.
   iii. Modify the city sign code to incorporate the design principles included in the Main Street Organization design guidelines.
   iv. Work towards the completion of a downtown plan that includes the elements listed above by 1997.

Comment [JB58]: No changes recommended. However, do we need/want to define what ‘serves residents means? The majority of business from local residents? What about a regional facility where most of the business is from non-Ferndale residents? Staff has taken the position that since Ferndale generates fewer sales tax than any other jurisdiction per person, any new business with a sales tax footprint is a benefit, provided that they mitigate their impacts through impact fees, etc.

Comment [JB59]: Is the future of Downtown retail?

Comment [JB60]: Expand on this: downtown will not benefit through the same economic development policies as other parts of the community, and it cannot compete with other parts of the community unless those other neighborhoods are artificially constrained (wherein downtown would not benefit so much as the other areas would suffer). The choice is not only where to go in Ferndale, but if a business is going to come to Ferndale at all.

Comment [JB61]: Ferndale Image Group, Main Street Organization, Ferndale Downtown Association, others? Should the city rely on private civic groups to carry this torch, especially when the perspectives of a vocal (but changing) minority may suddenly shift within a group. Consider changing several of these elements to focus more on city action.

Comment [JB62]: While staff will continue to propose modifications to Downtown zoning, we generally feel that the overall vision is in place. Does a more specific “downtown plan” need to be created?
B. Capitalize on the assets of the downtown area by encouraging the preservation of historic building features and by focusing attention to the Nooksack River and the city parks that adjoin the downtown area.
   i. Develop plans for the creation of a trail system that provides pedestrian access to the river and links Pioneer Park, Vanderyacht Park and the downtown area.
   ii. Work with private organizations such as the Main Street Organization, the Ferndale Image Group and the Ferndale Chamber of Commerce to provide incentives to downtown property owners to encourage the renovation of existing commercial buildings.

C. Encourage the development of retail businesses that cater to the traveling public in locations that are a convenient distance from Interstate 5 and are located within or adjacent to established commercial areas.
   i. Provide for more flexibility in areas zoned for general commercial and highway commercial uses to allow for a wider variety of retail commercial land uses.
   ii. Develop standards for commercial development to ensure that new commercial development is attractive. Standards should consider elements such as appropriate building scale, type of construction materials, landscaping, signing, and outdoor storage.

D. Maintain a commercial land supply that is sufficiently large enough to meet the varied needs of commercial land users.

E. Discourage non-compatible (particularly residential uses) land uses from locating in areas that are suitable and desirable for commercial uses.

F. The City should encourage mixed use developments in appropriate areas.
Industrial Land Use Goal

II. Encourage the development of new industries that provide living wage jobs for area residents.

Rationale

There are any number of factors that an industrial developer needs to consider when selecting a location for a new plant. Many of these factors are beyond the control of the City. The City should focus on ensuring that it maintains an adequate land supply sufficiently served with utilities. The City also needs to attempt to remove any unnecessary obstacles to development that could cause an industrial developer to locate elsewhere.

Industrial Land Use Policies

A. Maintain an industrial land supply that is sufficient in size to meet the varied needs of industrial land users.

B. Capitalize on the assets the City has to offer to industrial land users, such as access to Interstate 5 (at Slater Road and Grandview Road interchanges), the proximity to the Burlington Northern Railroad and the availability of city utility services.

C. Plan for adequate road and utility infrastructure to meet the varied needs of industrial users.

D. Discourage non-compatible (particularly residential uses) land uses from locating in areas that are suitable and desirable for industrial uses.

E. Encourage the development of industrial parks that provide more flexibility and options for development for industrial uses and provide for a mix of industrial and commercial uses.

i. Industrial parks have the advantage of bringing fully improved industrial land to the market while still providing maximum flexibility in lot configuration and development approval procedures.

F. In cooperation with appropriate agencies, the City will identify and regulate the use of wetlands, essential habitat areas, and other critical lands within the incorporated Urban Growth Area.

Residential Land Use Goal

III. Encourage the development of a wide range of housing types and densities to meet the differing housing needs of Ferndale residents.
Rationale
The residential needs of the community are varied. The City needs to provide housing opportunities for a full range of densities and housing types that recognize environmental constraints, land use patterns and offer appropriate protection to established neighborhoods.

Residential Land Use Policies

A. The City will support a land use strategy that maintains the quality and character of existing neighborhoods and that encourages cost-effective development.

B. The City will encourage new development consisting of a variety of land uses adjacent to existing development which will take advantage of the existing infrastructure network.

C. The City will encourage residential development that reflects a pattern of an orderly outward progression from the existing built environment.

D. Provide for clustering of residential development through a planned unit development procedure that allows for increased density within or adjacent to low-density neighborhoods, when such projects can demonstrate that adequate buffers and/or project design features will result in no detrimental impacts to existing residential neighborhoods and will protect environmentally sensitive areas.

E. Provide opportunities for park and trail development to create a feeling of community spirit. Trails and other recreational facilities should connect neighborhood commercial nodes, schools, parks, and other local services to provide recreational activities and increase opportunities for physical activities for citizens of all ages.

F. Encourage connections to trails and open space corridors through developments to facilitate access to the trail and park system.
Environmental Land Use Goal

IV. Encourage environmentally sensitive areas to be left in a natural state.

Rationale

Environmental constraints need to be considered in all development projects. The City should first consider the protection of the environmentally sensitive areas and second consider alternatives to allow development of the adjacent non-sensitive areas in a manner that provides property owners with a reasonable use of their land.

Environmental Land Use Policies

A. Provide for adequate buffers surrounding stream corridors and encourage developers to dedicate stream corridors as public open space, whenever practical.
   i. Provide credit for park mitigation fees for any developer who voluntarily dedicates stream corridors to the city as open space.
   ii. Amend development regulations to encourage clustering of development away from stream corridors or other environmentally sensitive areas.

B. Encourage the preservation of wetland areas through the use of innovative techniques such as “wetland banking,” “advance mitigation” and clustering of development.

C. Protect aquifer recharge areas through the enforcement of water quality standards on all new development projects.

D. Preserve flood storage capacity in those portions of the floodplain that are not protected by dikes.

E. Prohibit development in identified geologically hazardous areas unless hazards can be adequately mitigated through measures identified by qualified technical experts.

F. Development which occurs in identified flood hazard areas must be reviewed by a qualified hydrologist or similar professional to determine the potential flood risks associated with the development of such areas, including:
   i. Determination of flood plain elevations and proposed building elevations;
   ii. Impact of development on existing flood storage capacity;

Comment [JB72]: The City cannot use park impact fee credits for the dedication of any and all stream corridors – the City must demonstrate that these corridors are needed in its parks plan, which may not be possible if the areas to be dedicated cannot then be used for parks.

Comment [JB73]: Such as?
iii. Impact of flooding on public infrastructure, including access roads, utility systems, parks and other open spaces.

G. Development within identified flood hazard areas should be reviewed through a Planned Unit Development process to provide the developer and the City maximum flexibility to minimize the impacts of development in flood hazard areas—process which provides flexibility for the developer and the City to minimize the impacts of development in flood hazard areas.

Urban Growth Area/Annexation Goal

V. Provide for the orderly expansion and development of the city as required to meet the growth needs of the community.

Rationale

The development of the unincorporated portions of the City’s urban growth area is a key to the success of the comprehensive plan. If development occurs outside the City in a manner that is inconsistent with the plan, future opportunities for expansion of the city may be lost, or result in inefficient public services or conflicting land use patterns. Careful consideration of development within the UGA and annexation to the city is vital.

Urban Growth Area/Annexation Policies

A. Annexations to the City shall be comprised of logical boundaries that to the greatest degree practical:

i. Create regular boundaries;

ii. Follow topographic features or other physical features, such as streams, railroad rights-of-way or freeway rights-of-way;

iii. Provide for services to both sides of a city street;

iv. Avoid the creation of unincorporated “islands;”

v. Avoid “panhandle” annexations.

B. Annexations to the City shall avoid conversion of active resource lands whenever possible.

i. Active agricultural lands of over 10 acres in size shall not be annexed into the City unless the property owner consents to the annexation and commits to converting the agricultural property into urban land uses within 18 months following the annexation.

C. Annexation requests shall be reviewed by the City Planning Commission prior to completion so that appropriate zoning of the properties to be
annexed can be established in conformance with this Comprehensive Plan.

D. The City shall conduct a cost/benefit study for all annexations over 20 acres in size or $1,000,000 in total assessed valuation. Such study shall consider the following:

i. Projected costs of providing services to the area to be annexed, including street maintenance, storm water runoff system maintenance, police protection, parks and recreation, general governmental services.

ii. Estimated costs to extend city utility services and upgrade substandard infrastructure including streets, storm water runoff systems, parks, and street lighting.

iii. Assessment of impact to any special districts, such as a fire district or cemetery district.

iv. The tax revenues that would likely be received by the city resulting from the annexation.

v. The tax revenues that would likely be generated in the annexed area as a result of development that would take place following the annexation.

vi. Any sharing of tax revenues or payment of existing capital improvements that may be present in the area to be annexed that may be required by Whatcom County as a condition of annexation.

E. For annexations over 20 acres in size or $1,000,000 in total assessed valuation, the City may enter into a development agreement with the proponents of the annexation that would commit the City and the proponents to installing specific improvements and approving specific development plans.

F. The City shall work with Whatcom County to develop an interlocal agreement that deals with issues related to annexation and development within the unincorporated portions of the urban growth area.