



Lake Whatcom Policy Group

May 15, 2017 Meeting

Brief Digest of Presentations and Discussion

Policy Group members in attendance: Todd Donovan (Whatcom County Council); Todd Citron (Lake Whatcom Water and Sewer District Board); Dan Hammill (Bellingham City Council). Other Council or Board members present: April Barker (Bellingham City Council).

1. Lake Whatcom Build-Out Report -- Recent Residential Construction Trends

This report is produced every year to provide a broad overview of construction trends in the Lake Whatcom watershed. The analysis uses parcels and their zoning and does not analyze other features that may impact whether a parcel is developable, such as steep slopes. If building value on a lot is less than \$10,000 it is considered undeveloped. Public and forestry lands are removed.

As of January 2017 there were 7001 existing residential units in the watershed and a potential for another 1,631 units to be developed. Most developable parcels are in Sudden Valley and the rural watershed. There are 110 potential new units in the City portion of the watershed, 95 in the unincorporated UGA, 610 in Sudden Valley, and 816 in the rural watershed. Most rural parcels are zoned for one residential unit per 5 acres.

Rates of development in all areas slowed down dramatically during the last recession. Most current development activity is in the rural watershed. In 2014 there was a pickup of development because of the conversion of Wildwood recreation lots to vacation homes, with 58 units constructed. There were 7 new units developed in 2015, increasing to 16 by 2016.

There are some lots owned by the Sudden Valley Community Association, and these are not counted as developable in the analysis. All but a handful of lots (about 14) owned by the Association have been restricted from future development.

2. Updates on program areas

a. Land acquisition and property management. The City has hired a new property specialist to assist in managing the lands acquired using the acquisition fund. Staff are focusing on restoration work, including removal of invasive plants. There is some thinning activity on some parcels to improve tree health and create a more diverse forest. Currently the City is considering thinning larger trees on a few lots. The normal practice is to leave trees in place to protect soils and contribute to organic buildup, but this practice needs to be weighed against possible creation of a fire hazard.

The City is removing "social trails" (mountain biking, hiking, horseback riding, etc.) that are not built to appropriate standards and that could trigger erosion or other property damage. Some trails will remain, such as a trail maintained by the Bay to Baker running group. Some mountain bike trails are also retained if they are already heavily used, but may be re-routed and improved

to guard against possible environmental damage. Some small bridges are also being replaced as necessary. There was a landslide on City-owned parcel near Lake Whatcom Boulevard that the city is in the process of cleaning up and stabilizing.

- b. Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) update – Enforcement, and Detailed Implementation Plan (DIP). The Lake Whatcom program has documented its enforcement protocols, most of which are based in City or County codes. The Department of Ecology has reviewed these practices and has found them acceptable in enforcing required TMDL activities. In most cases, enforcement starts with education and an effort to seek cooperative compliance from a landowner. After that, depending on circumstances, a penalty of up to \$500 may be assessed, and the owner may be required to restore the property or stormwater facilities that were modified. With a second violation, there may be a civil misdemeanor penalty along with additional fines.

The Lake Whatcom program is working on its Detailed Implementation Plan (DIP) to the Department of Ecology, which is due in October. This will lay out 10 years of planned activities to reduce phosphorus and coliform, with the first half of the plan containing more detail, coinciding with the program's 5 year plan. The Policy Group will be briefed on progress in completing this required plan at its July and October meetings.

In 2018 the requirements of this plan will be incorporated into the Department of Ecology's permits under the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES). The DIP will be updated every 5 years.

- c. c. Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Prevention Program. Inspections started in February and the inspection stations at Lake Whatcom and Lake Samish opened on April 22. Inspections are now available 7 days a week on Lake Samish and Lake Whatcom. The South Bay Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife launch site is staffed on the weekends and holidays, as is the launch at Sudden Valley. Launch demand is monitored and hours of operation at the different sites may be adjusted depending on need. Activity is down somewhat year-to-date in comparison to 2016 as the weather has been less conducive to boating. Thus far in 2017, there have been 1,488 permits issued, and 1,923 inspections completed.
- d. Data Team – Function and recent activities. The data team was created in 1998 as part of the Lake Whatcom Management Program. This is a multijurisdictional team consisting of staff from the City, County, Water District, Department of Ecology, and Western Washington University (Institute for Watershed Studies, and Geology Department). The team meets 11 times a year to share information and discuss new data coming from various Lake Whatcom monitoring activities. The Data Team has been focusing on data to help optimize modeling efforts and to reduce uncertainty by targeting areas where there are data gaps. Some of this information may be used to help

	<p>recalibrate the models used to support TMDL efforts. The team also reviews Lake Whatcom monitoring contracts.</p> <p>The Lake Whatcom Water and Sewer District is sponsoring a research project to provide information on possible fecal coliform contamination of the south end of the Lake from septic systems. This information will be available at the District June 14 Board meeting.</p>
3. Topics for remaining meetings	
	<p>Policy Group members and staff discussed topics for the remaining meetings of the year. One topic identified at the February meeting was the financial challenge facing the County Flood Control District, which has been used for a number of projects countywide, including in the Lake Whatcom watershed. Policy Group members requested that staff provide a briefing at the July meeting outlining the process the County is using to review different revenue options. An update on any budget proposals arising from this process will occur in October.</p> <p>A capital projects review is scheduled for July. The October meeting will include an update on City and County efforts to regulate vacation rentals in the watershed.</p>
<p><i>Upcoming Meetings:</i></p> <p>Lake Whatcom Policy Group, July 17, 2017, 3:00 PM, Fireplace Room, 625 Halleck Street.</p>	