

PRESS RELEASE



County Council

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‘Buildable Lands Report’ Approved but Somers has concerns about increasing rural growth

Snohomish County continues to meet the Growth Management Act’s (GMA) goals for accommodating population increases into urban areas, but the impacts of a large population growth in the county’s rural areas remains a serious concern to Councilmember Dave Somers of Monroe.

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“With only a few small exceptions we are right on track to fulfill GMA’s growth requirements for our county,” said Somers, who chairs the county council’s Planning and Community Development subcommittee.

The county council last week approved a once-every-five-years “Buildable Lands Report” that declares there is sufficient residential and employment land capacity within urban growth areas (county cities and the surrounding urbanized unincorporated county) to meet the county’s adopted growth goals. Under the state Growth Management Act (GMA), counties and cities are broadly required to protect rural lands by containing most future growth to within already urbanized areas.

Increasing growth in rural areas, however, is not within the report’s purview, said Somers, and he is worried about many new residents moving into these areas and expecting urban levels of public service – levels the county cannot afford to provide.

“We are already much higher in rural growth than either King or Pierce county,” said Somers. “Right now we have an almost \$500 million shortfall in identified funding for badly needed road improvements in our urban areas through 2025, and I don’t know where we will find the money to upgrade rural infrastructure, hire more deputies and provide all the services city folks moving into the country will expect of us.”

Somers said much of the high rural population growth is a result of the county’s “rural clusters” development rules that effectively allow one home for every 2.5 acres in specified rural developments, where five acres is the rural norm.

“We are the only major county that allows such dense housing on our rural land,” he said, “and I believe we have to take a close look at changing these development patterns. We cannot afford to do otherwise.

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