

DATE: April 9, 2020
TO: Snohomish County Tomorrow Planning Advisory Committee Subcommittee
CC: Steve Toy, Snohomish County Buildable Lands Team
FROM: Morgan Shook and Margaret Raimann, ECONorthwest
SUBJECT: SCT PAC SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING 4 SUMMARY

To address changes to the Review and Evaluation Program for Buildable Lands as described in E2SSB-5254, ECONorthwest is working with Snohomish County to assist in identifying and addressing recommended updates to the County’s Buildable Lands Methodology. The County contracted with ECONorthwest to develop and recommend updates to the methodology in collaboration with the Snohomish County Buildable Lands Team, a subcommittee of the Snohomish County Tomorrow (SCT) Planning Advisory Committee (PAC), and other key stakeholders. Following this process, the Snohomish County Buildable Lands Team will use the recommendations to update the methodology in the 2021 Buildable Lands Report (BLR).

The SCT PAC subcommittee held its fourth (and last) meeting on February 11, 2020 at 1:00 p.m. ECONorthwest and Snohomish County Buildable Lands Program staff led the meeting, which provided a presentation of refined analysis of land status classification and market factor. Information used in the presentation was based on the “Snohomish County Method Alternatives and Evaluation Criteria” technical memorandum from ECONorthwest, sent to the PAC Subcommittee on February 7, 2020.

This memorandum provides a summary of the February 11th meeting, focusing on key meeting outcomes and next steps.

Key Issues and Desired Outcomes

Findings and proposed recommendations. ECONorthwest presented key findings of the key issues and proposed recommendations included in the memorandum provided in the materials for the meeting. Comments and questions discussed during the subcommittee meeting are summarized below.

Land classification thresholds

- Subcommittee members asked about the capacity implications and whether these relationships hold up over time and in different geographic locations within the UGA.
 - County and ECO staff clarified the intent of the “best performing” thresholds to balance over and under counting parcels. These thresholds are suggestions, and, there are some policy decisions that will need to be made, in addition to using the empirical analysis as a basis. The thresholds are set as a good first step, and there is always the option to override in specific circumstances during map review with each city.

-
- Some subcommittee members suggested that the term “constant” is not intuitive to understanding “no capacity assumed” or “current use maintained.” They suggested different terminology or that more clarity in terminology be provided.

Market Factor

- Subcommittee members discussed that the current market factor, when applied to the SWUGA, already seemed very high, so lowering the assumptions makes sense.
 - County and ECO staff agreed that empirical evidence supports this notion for single family development. However, at the present time there is not enough information available over the long-term to evaluate capacity utilization rates for other development types (multi-family, mixed-use, commercial).
- Subcommittee members noted the inherent tensions with GMA requirements to base capacity assumptions on what happened in the past. It may be possible to use the Land Capacity Analysis for the next comp plan update to look at future issues and not be held to past assumptions.
 - County staff noted that this is something they had to address in the 2015 plan update process—i.e., how to analyze capacity for both past and future targets. They noted that the Land Capacity Analysis is not directly tied to the Buildable Lands observed densities and allows for separate planned density assumptions.

Reasonable Measures

- Subcommittee members asked about the process for the reasonable measures matrix.
 - County staff clarified that the recommended matrix will feed directly into the CPP update that will be conducted at SCT over the next year. At that time, there will be a separate process to specifically amend the matrix in Appendix D of the CPPs during that process.

Next Steps

County staff and ECONorthwest stated that the next step in this process is to develop “inserts” that will serve as technical supplements to the existing buildable lands procedures report and reasonable measure program documents. The supplements will summarize the information in the memorandum used for this meeting.

- Subcommittee members agreed to this approach, and to forward the results to the PAC as the PAC Subcommittee recommendation. Additional time (two weeks) for comments from subcommittee members on the recommendation was provided. This would still allow time to address any remaining issues prior to forwarding the subcommittee’s recommendation to the PAC for their meeting on March 12.

The County and ECONorthwest will present the PAC Subcommittee recommendation at an upcoming PAC meeting, followed by a briefing to the SCT Steering Committee. County staff will also coordinate the distribution of materials from the SCT process to stakeholders.

-
- Subcommittee members discussed the next steps in the process and the need to communicate information from the Buildable Lands work to stakeholders and elected officials.
 - County staff agreed and recommended spending time providing background to the buildable lands report with the SCT Steering Committee (especially considering the number of new members). This would allow them to have more context for the proposed updates to the methodology.