

**WHATCOM COUNTY  
PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT SERVICES**

**POPULATION GROWTH MONITORING REPORT**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this report is to compile recent population growth estimates for Whatcom County's urban growth areas (UGAs) and non-urban areas, and to compare these estimates with the population growth planned in the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan (WCCP). Table 4 in Chapter 1 of the Comprehensive Plan contains the population projections for UGAs and non-UGA areas for years 2013 through 2036. Comprehensive Plan policies 2S-5 and 2DD-1 require monitoring of growth patterns within the county's urban and non-urban areas.

This report uses population growth estimates derived by using two different methods. First, growth estimates are derived from the current Small Area Estimate Program (SAEP) UGA population estimates from the Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM). The SAEP estimates do not provide an estimate of growth outside the UGAs. Planning and Development Services (PDS) staff derived a non-UGA growth estimate by subtracting the total SAEP UGA growth estimates from OFM's overall estimated countywide growth. Because these are two different OFM statistics with different methodologies, some error is likely introduced in combining the two to create a new statistic for non-urban areas.

The second method of estimating population growth is to derive estimates based on building permit data. This produces an estimate of population growth that would be generated by the net gain in dwelling units outside UGAs. Because the two methods of estimating growth differ greatly, they can be expected to yield very different results.

In addition, this report shows recent subdivision activity outside the UGAs, which is another indication of non-UGA growth patterns.

**II. SAEP-BASED ESTIMATES**

The OFM's SAEP program generates population estimates for UGAs as of April 1 of each year. OFM also publishes population estimates for cities and for counties overall, also as of April 1, using a different methodology. Figure 1 shows annual estimated growth for each UGA over the most recent five years for which OFM SAEP April 1 estimates are available, between the April 1, 2012 and the April 1, 2017 estimates. The last row of the chart gives an estimate of non-UGA growth derived by subtracting the total UGA estimates from the OFM countywide estimates.

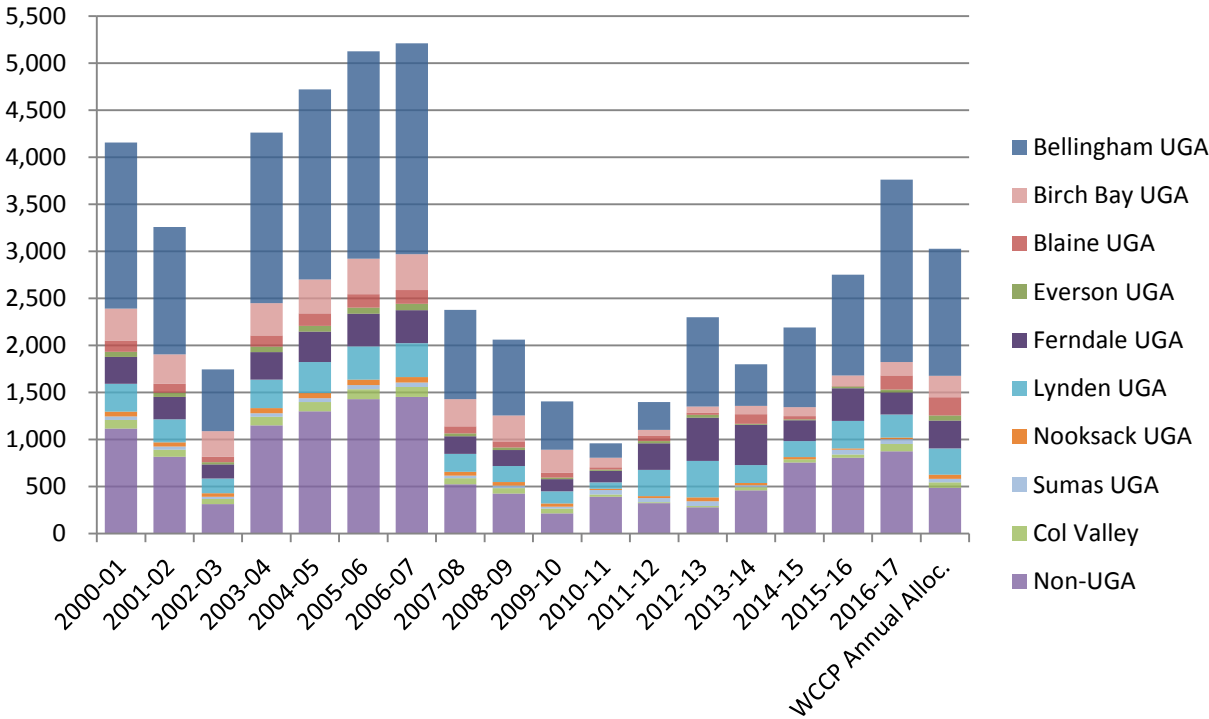
Figure 1. OFM Population Growth Estimates (April 1)						
	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2012-17 Total
<b>Countywide</b>	2,300	1,800	2,190	2,750	3,760	12,800
<b>Bellingham UGA</b>	947	442	845	1,070	1,937	5,241
<b>Birch Bay UGA</b>	65	88	97	115	141	506
<b>Blaine UGA</b>	25	102	33	1	150	313
<b>Everson UGA</b>	30	11	10	20	31	103
<b>Ferndale UGA</b>	458	427	220	346	327	1,688
<b>Lynden UGA</b>	390	190	170	291	244	1,285
<b>Nooksack UGA</b>	40	25	25	15	15	120
<b>Sumas UGA</b>	50	19	(1)	50	54	172
<b>Col. Valley UGA</b>	14	33	34	34	75	192
<b>Total UGAs</b>	2,020	1,338	1,435	1,942	2,883	9,619
<b>Non-UGA</b>	280	462	755	808	877	3,181

WCCP Policies 2S-5 and 2DD-1 require studying population growth trends over five years. Figure 2 compares the five-year OFM SAEP estimates with the five-year prorated allocation from the WCCP Table 4. For all UGAs except Ferndale, estimated growth was below the prorated WCCP growth projections. The far right hand column shows the percentage of the allocated growth that OFM estimates to have occurred in each UGA.

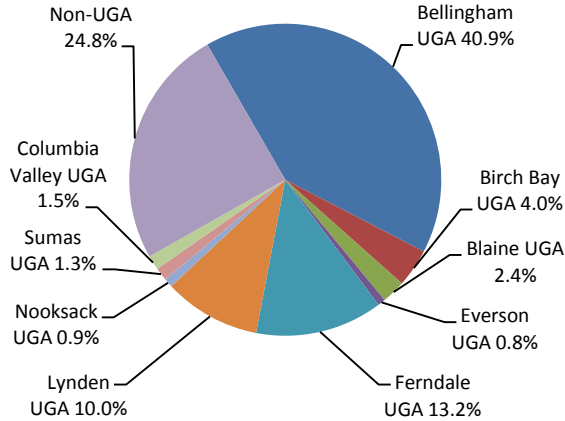
Figure 2. OFM SAEP Growth Estimates and WCCP Growth Allocations				
	OFM SAEP Growth April 1 2012-2017	WCCP Growth Allocations 5- year Proration	Surplus (Deficit)	Growth as a Percentage of Allocation (5 years)
<b>Bellingham UGA</b>	5,241	6,750	(1,509)	77.6%
<b>Birch Bay UGA</b>	506	1,148	(642)	44.1%
<b>Blaine UGA</b>	313	960	(647)	32.6%
<b>Everson UGA</b>	103	270	(167)	38.0%
<b>Ferndale UGA</b>	1,688	1,485	203	113.6%
<b>Lynden UGA</b>	1,285	1,392	(107)	92.3%
<b>Nooksack UGA</b>	120	215	(95)	55.9%
<b>Sumas UGA</b>	172	190	(18)	90.5%
<b>Columbia Valley UGA</b>	192	292	(101)	65.5%
<b>Non-UGA</b>	3,181	2,438	742	130.4%
<b>Total</b>	12,800	15,141	(2,341)	84.5%

Figure 3 includes SAEP growth estimates going back to 2000 and compares them with the annual proportion of the WCCP’s adopted 2013-2036 population growth projections (far right column). In the last five years, which have seen a gradual recovery from an economic downturn, the overall population growth has been below the annual average projection until 2016-2017, when estimated growth exceeded annual projected growth.

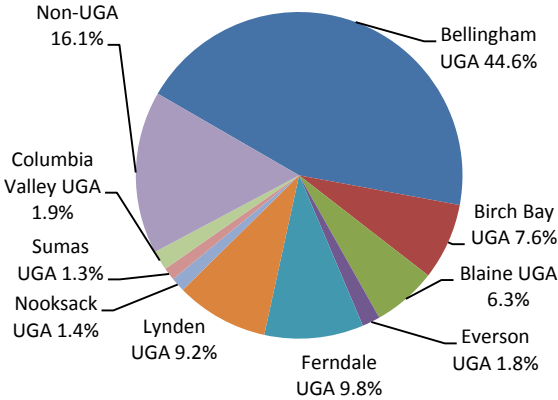
Figure 3. 2000-2017 OFM SAEP UGA Population Growth Estimates and WCCP Projection



**Estimated 2012-17 Growth Share (SAEP)**



**WCCP Allocated 2013-36 Growth Share**



Overall, the SAEP estimates indicate that recent growth in UGAs has been below that projected in the current WCCP. In the last five years only the Ferndale UGA has seen population growth higher than the growth projected in the WCCP. The five-year population growth for the non-UGA area is the difference between OFM's estimated overall county growth and the SAEP estimates for all UGAs. Using this method, the estimated 3,181 five-year population growth for the non-UGA area is above the current WCCP's projection for five years (2,438).

### **III. BUILDING PERMIT-BASED ESTIMATES**

This method estimates population by calculating the net gain in permitted dwelling units (new units completed minus units demolished) and multiplying the net gain by OFM's occupancy and persons-per-household statistics.

**Non-Urban Growth Estimate.** Multiplying the net gain of dwelling units by the OFM rural occupancy rate of 82.0% and the persons-per-household figure of 2.63, PDS estimates the non-UGA population growth was 381 persons between April 1, 2016 and March 31, 2017. Figure 4 provides estimates for 2012-2017.

Year	Single Family Final	Mobile Home Final	Duplex Final	Single Family Demo	Net Unit Gain	Persons/ Household	Occupancy Rate	Estimated Population Growth	Allocated Population Growth
2012-13	104	24	-	19	109	2.63	82.0%	235	488
2013-14	124	24	-	23	125	2.63	82.0%	270	488
2014-15	123	41	1	19	146	2.63	82.0%	315	488
2015-16	158	19	4	17	164	2.63	82.0%	354	488
2016-17	168	18	2	11	177	2.63	82.0%	<b>381</b>	<b>488</b>
Totals	677	126	7	89	721	2.63	82.0%	<b>1,555</b>	<b>2,438</b>

The planned non-UGA population growth, per Table 4 of Comprehensive Plan Chapter 1, is 11,217 over the 23 years between 2013 and 2036. This equates to about 488 persons annually or 2,438 over a five-year period. The estimated 2016 population growth of 381 persons falls below the annual allocation.

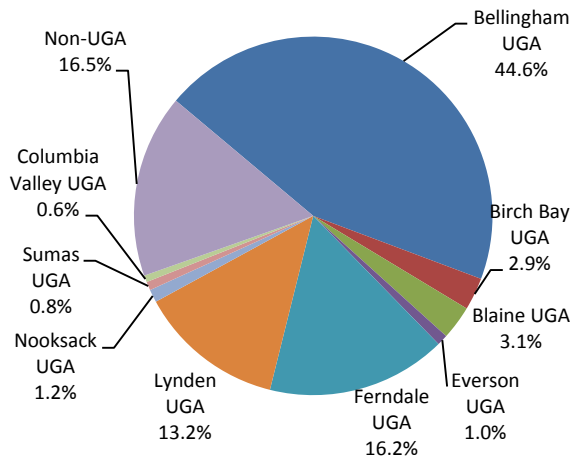
Using this method, the estimated annual non-UGA growth has been below the 488-person annual allocation in each of the past five years. The cumulative estimated growth of 1,555 persons from 2012-2017 is below the allocated growth of 2,438 persons for those five years.

**Urban Growth Area Estimates.** To estimate growth in the urban areas, PDS added OFM's data for net gains in dwelling units in the cities by type (single-family, multi-family, and mobile homes) to the County's figures for net dwelling unit gains in adjacent unincorporated UGA area, and multiplied by OFM's persons-per-household and occupancy rate statistics for each UGA (see Figure 5).

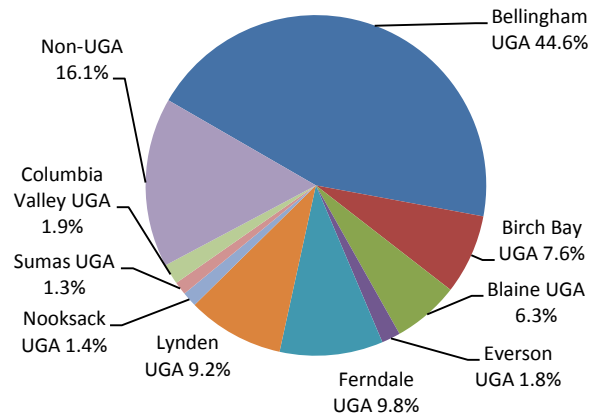
Figure 5. Urban and Non-Urban Estimated Population Growth From Building Permit Data						
	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	Totals
Bellingham UGA	563	330	848	1,078	1,378	4,198
Birch Bay UGA	51	34	60	68	63	276
Blaine UGA	28	103	45	42	70	288
Everson UGA	20	14	14	17	26	92
Ferndale UGA	330	493	199	279	225	1,525
Lynden UGA	240	275	196	313	216	1,240
Nooksack UGA	35	24	26	12	12	109
Sumas UGA	3	13	8	13	37	73
Columbia Valley UGA	7	9	13	11	18	57
Non-UGA	235	270	315	354	381	1,555
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,511</b>	<b>1,565</b>	<b>1,725</b>	<b>2,187</b>	<b>2,425</b>	<b>9,413</b>

Source: OFM housing data (incorporated areas) Whatcom County permit records (unincorporated areas). Data are for April 1 to March 31.

**Estimated 2012-17  
Growth Share (Permit)**



**WCCP Allocated 2013-36  
Growth Share**

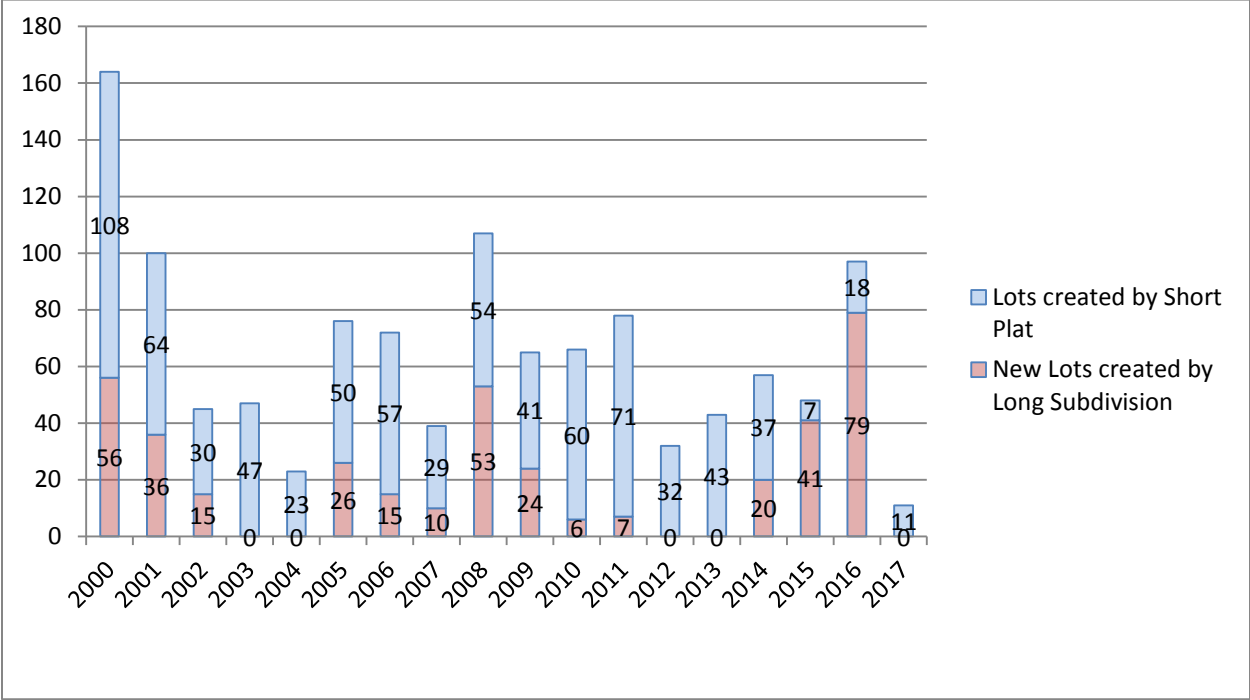


The permit-based method yields significantly lower growth estimates than the SAEP figures (Figures 1 and 2). The SAEP method uses a variety of factors of which building permit data is only one. Despite this difference, the permit-based estimates are useful in gauging development activity.

**IV. NON-URBAN SUBDIVISION ACTIVITY**

A less direct indicator of non-urban growth trends is the number of new lots created outside UGAs through long and short subdivision plats (see Figure 6). Between 2013 and 2017 a total of 256 new lots were created, an average of about 51 per year.<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 6. New Lots Created By Non-Urban Subdivisions**



NOTE: In 2016, 58 of the 79 lots created by long subdivision were in the Point Roberts limited area of more intensive rural development (LAMIRD).

<sup>1</sup> PDS subdivision records, using UGA boundaries at time of subdivision. New lots are total lots minus the original existing lot.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

Over the last five years, estimated growth in most of the UGAs has been less than allocated in Table 4 of the Comprehensive Plan, while estimated growth outside the UGAs is either below or above the allocation for non-urban growth depending on which estimation method is used. Using the SAEP method, non-urban growth accounts for 24.8% of the estimated countywide growth in the five years between April 1, 2012 and April 1, 2017. Using the building permit method, estimated non-urban growth accounted for 16.5% of countywide growth in those same five years.<sup>2</sup>

Of the two methods used in this report, the building permit method more directly addresses the overarching purpose of non-urban growth monitoring, which is to track how much development is occurring outside UGAs. This method indicates that residential development outside the UGAs is not taking place at a pace that exceeds the growth allocations of the Comprehensive Plan. The number of new lots created in the non-urban areas also suggests a modest rate of development in the non-urban areas.

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<sup>2</sup> SAEP method calculation: 3,181/12,800 from Figure 1. Permit method: 1,555/9,413 from Figure 5.