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THANKS for GIVING!

Friends of Skagit County would like to thank each of you for your support. If you haven't made a contribution this year, please take the time to do so TODAY!

Friends was organized 20 years ago by citizens who believed good land use decisions would make a difference in Skagit County. And it has! Skagit County doesn't look like Lynnwood because of the hard work of a dedicated group of Friends who continue to work toward the goal – stop sprawl, save Skagit!

We appreciate your continued support of our work to preserve Skagit County for the future.

FRIENDS OF SKAGIT COUNTY WORKS FOR YOU IN SKAGIT COUNTY! PLEASE JOIN TODAY!

NAME _____ E-MAIL _____

ADDRESS _____ CITY _____ ZIP _____

PHONE _____

- I'm a REGULAR *Friend!* (\$35) I'm a FAMILY *Friend!* (\$50) I'm a NEIGHBORLY *Friend!* (\$100)
- I'm a SPECIAL *Friend!* (\$250) I'm a UNIQUE *Friend!* (\$500) I'm a _____ *Friend!* (\$_____)
- I'm making an additional \$_____ contribution to the LEGAL FUND.
- I'm making an additional \$_____ contribution in honor/memory of: _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

- I CAN HELP WITH: - research - monitoring county meetings - newsletters - mailings
 - computers - managing the website - other (_____)

DONATIONS TO FRIENDS ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE TO THE EXTENT ALLOWED BY LAW. (Please consult your tax accountant.)

PLEASE MAIL THIS FORM AND YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO **PO BOX 2632, MOUNT VERNON, WA 98273** OR CHARGE IT TO YOUR CREDIT CARD ON THE *NETWORK FOR GOOD* or at **www.friendsofskagitcountv.org** — click on "get involved." 021010

Land Quote -

“Our view is that if people believe they need to bring in experts or starchitects to transform their communities, they will never discover their own abilities or identities. They'll lose respect for themselves and their own instincts. It's the same as bringing in a shopping-mall developer: The local hardware store owner is the one who really knows what people need, just as **we think people know what they need** for their public destinations. And we have never been disappointed. To us, the community is the expert, so long as they are asked for their input.” -- **Fred Kent, Project for Public Space, NYC.** - www.pps.org

Holiday Suggestion: Drink Wine & Support Friends!

Nell Thorne Restaurant, LaConner serves their own Elephant Head (label) wine and donates a portion of the proceeds to FOSC. To make reservations call 360.466.4261 or e-mail nellinfo@nellthorn.com. Nell Thorne serves lunch and dinner in their restaurant and bar and features a variety of local foods sourced from Northwest and Skagit producers. Thank you to Susan and Casey!

North Sound Alliance (NSA) Rep Still Needed

Each member organization of NSA is entitled to appoint 3 delegates to be members of the NSA strategy team. At present FOSC has one strategy team member and is looking for 2 more delegates to share in NSA decision making. We are all busy, but it's important that FOSC be represented on the strategy team when the NSA selects what action to take. Each delegate is expected to attend 2 partial days of training and as many NSA monthly meetings as possible. **ARE YOU WILLING TO SERVE?** Please contact us if you wish to have a "seat at the table" in deciding NSA actions. Thanks very much! Ellen Bynum, Executive Director, FOSC, (360) 419-0988 or friends@fidalgo.net. Howard Pellett, Board Member, FOSC (360) 293-8128 or howardp71@gmail.com.

Friends of Skagit County Needs YOU!

Would you spend two hours a month working to keep Skagit County from looking like suburbia? Could you read the public notices in Thursday's Skagit Valley Herald and report on any which do not seem to be appropriate development for the County or cities? Can you give up 2 hours of television, sports or your favorite hobby to help Friends of Skagit County with its work? Is it worth it to monitor what the County is planning to change in the Code Amendments or the next Comprehensive Plan update so inappropriate development applications cannot be accepted by the County permit department? If you answered "yes" to any of the above questions, please call Ellen Bynum at 360-419-0988 or e-mail friends@fidalgo.net or Gene Derig, President 360-293-3928 at gderig@eanacortes.com and let us know you are willing to join Friends Board of Directors for a 2 year term.

We Can't Do This Work Without YOU!!

Continuing series on Comprehensive planning

A Sense of Community -- Sub-Area Planning by June Kite

A community is defined as a number of people having common interests, living in the same place as districts or towns, and subject to the same laws.

Vision of the Future was one of the first steps in developing the Comprehensive Plan. Citizens were asked to submit their ideas on what was needed (wanted) to keep Skagit County the best place to live. Twenty years since the goals of GMA were incorporated into the Plan the County has *Envision 2060* and reviewing what is working and what needs more work.

In 1990 at the beginning of managing growth, the county population was almost equally 50% urban and 50% rural. Skagit County Commissioners adopted rules for the best use of the rural lands and set the goal of 80% of new population growth in Urban Growth Areas (UGA) and 20% in the rural areas. Incorporated cities and towns have elected councils that guide the growth of their cities.

County planners have the people in rural settings to voice their participation on rural land use development through the Comprehensive Planning process. The Rural population of 2011 was at 46%. The county has failed to achieve the 80/20 split with annual increases ranging from 28 to 36% rural.

Sub-Area Plans, like the *Visions* process, gets Skagit County to look at the unique features that make up rural Skagit County -- mountains, flood plains, river valleys, salt water islands and lake side communities. Local residents have the opportunity to help shape their own place and sense of community with **Sub-Area Planning**.

Four Sub-Areas plans have been established and citizen advisory committees selected to develop plans for their unique situation and vision for their community.

1. South Fidalgo Island – to preserve the rural characteristics of the island and recognize the value of the saltwater industries. Residents initiated a Community Council to guide the planning process.
2. Bay View Ridge – an established industrial and residential area with municipal services of sewer and water that qualifies it as an Urban Growth Area (UGA) developed because cities argued they could not increase their densities.
3. Alger – Historical Rural Village located amid forested hills with recreational and tourist attractions in the I-5 High Way corridor. Skagit County Planning & Development Services assisted local residents in the work and development of the plan.
4. Guemes Island – surrounded by salt water, ferry access and limited water supply, island residents asked for and received assistance from the American Institute of Architects planning team who helped residents conduct the community planning work and final plan development.

Other Sub-Area plan have been listed for lake side communities – Big Lake, Lake Cavanaugh, Lake Mac Murray, Clear Lake, Lake Sixteen – all historical logging communities of 100 years ago. Will they lose their historical setting or will they become an urbanized suburb? - *June Kite is Vice-President of Friends.*

Will this happen in Skagit County? Not if we are vigilant.

Sick suburbs, expiring exurbs

Regions such as Snohomish County that fell hard for developers' dreams of remote housing projects are paying a severe price in foreclosures and short sales. The cruel market correction confirms the economic value of denser, closer-in residential patterns.

“During the housing bubble, Snohomish County allowed a large number of rural subdivisions,” said Tim Trohimovich Co-Director of Planning & Law for Futurewise. “These subdivisions had high costs for the families that bought the lots, the nearby farms and forests, and the environment. It is unfortunate, but not surprising, that these high costs have led to a high level of foreclosures,” he said.

The eager builders managed to persuade Snohomish County to adopt laws that allowed wholesale

removal of trees, clearing of land, and rapid approvals. Standard development practices that had been used to good effect in other Western Washington cities for years were rebuffed. Since then, county standards have been beefed up, but too late to head off the most recent wave of havoc on the landscape.

One code was cleverly disguised to sound noble, but in fact drove a stake through growth management principles. Under the law, hundreds of “Rural Cluster Subdivisions” (an absurd oxymoron of land use terminology) were approved. They are still on plat maps, awaiting, one hopes, legal extinction. Thankfully, most were not built, and many of the proponents are now bankrupt and gone.

There was some benefit to the Great Recession in that it cleaned house a bit. But the detritus of half-built projects, shoddy construction, and disconnected pockets of randomly-located microsuburbia carried with it a price. Snohomish County is now the reigning queen of short sales and foreclosures in the metropolitan area, by a good measure. Throughout the county, fully 38 percent of active housing transactions fall into these two categories, according to data from the Northwest Multiple Listing Service. Some areas are as high as 42 percent.

One long-standing observer of the American development industry, Christopher Leinberger, wrote a provocative piece in the *Atlantic* last year entitled “The Next Slum,” about the end of suburbs as we know them. Leinberger predicted that in the coming decades there will be fewer and fewer buyers wanting the American dream so popular over the past 50 years. Most younger people are instead preferring cities or close-in suburbs for their higher paying jobs, choices in culture, and a more diverse social setting — often within walking distance.

There are, of course, those who dismiss this theory based on the notion that as soon as young people reach childbearing age, they will opt for a big house and big yard. But as the 2010 Census has already revealed, household size is at an all-time low. Younger people are delaying marriage now *five years* longer than when they typically would marry a decade ago. That is a massive change of preferences and behavior in a short period of time.

As many demographers have pointed out, in 20 years, there simply won't be the sheer numbers of people around to buy all those free-standing houses in arcadia. Prophetically enough, ten years ago, even *The Wall Street Journal* crunched the numbers and concluded that buying a house the hinterlands was a very poor investment choice. And that was *before* the recession.

In recent years, the Center for Neighborhood Technology in Chicago has been tracking foreclosures in a number of urban areas. They found a common pattern, even more sharply defined than the one here: most foreclosures have occurred around the edges, while home ownership near the center has been stable by comparison — even if the values are somewhat diminished. Moreover, organizations such as the National Resources Defense Council have found that there is a direct correlation between high car ownership and foreclosures. The old saw about “Drive till you qualify” has been turned rather cruelly on its head. Turns out some people should have never gotten behind the wheel to begin with.

These patterns are vividly confirmed in the Chicago area, where outlying projects, complete with new high schools, have been stopped in their tracks by the recession, the rise in gas prices, and the fact that so many of these remote projects were highly speculative. “Places that were verging on becoming part of the Chicago area,” a real estate analyst says, “have reverted to rural status and are likely to stay that way for at least another generation.”

But here's the fascinating morality tale. Those counties and cities and towns that most heeded the tenets of growth management have fared the best in this worst of times. They are emerging with the strongest downtowns, the most stable housing, the best values, and the highest “quality of life” that everyone seems to seek as the holy grail.

The suburb might not be dead yet. But it's very ill indeed.

An earlier version of this story with active links appeared in [Crosscut.com](http://crosscut.com) and can be accessed by going to: <http://crosscut.com/2011/08/31/real-estate/21246/Sick-suburbs%2C-expiring-exurbs/print/>