

## 2. Background, Vision and Goals

### **History**

The city of Nooksack was named after the Nooksack Indian Tribe, which was indigenous to the Nooksack River valley at the time of European discovery. The word Nooksack, with various spellings, means "fern-eating people" (Noot - "people," Saak - "bracken fern").

The area of the city was first settled in the early to mid 1800s and was platted as the Village of Nooksack on September 16, 1865. At that time the village contained eleven blocks of varying size. In 1890 the plat for Nooksack City was filed by W. R. Moultray and M. J. Heney of the Nooksack Land and Development Company. In anticipation of the arrival of the Northern Pacific Railroad and the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad companies, Nooksack City added significant acreage and improved lot standards. The mining boom of the 1890s caused the population of Nooksack to grow to a high of 415.

Due to the efforts of Moultray, Heney, and others, the town developed a thriving business center, with a modern hotel, railroad station, and many other business enterprises. The lumber and mining industries as well as dairy and poultry farms, situated on the main railroad line into Canada, made Nooksack a busy and growing town.

During the early 1900's a series of large fires wiped out the business area of the city, as well as some of the houses. Nooksack has not yet regained what it lost. There have been general stores and garages over the years, and even a bank (until the great depression). After the fires and loss of the mining industry the population decreased and then remained stable up through 1970. At that point, Nooksack began slow residential growth. Nooksack is increasingly a bedroom community for the Bellingham and Cherry Point employment centers.

### **Prior Comprehensive Plan**

Nooksack first developed a comprehensive land-use plan in 1980. The plan included a land-use element which inventoried existing land uses, set goals for different uses, and recommended specific classifications for future land uses. Also included in the plan was a circulation element which included circulation goals and policies. The final section of the document included a set of recommended development standards for permitted uses within each land-use classification, lot sizes, parking requirements, and procedures for variances, comprehensive plan changes, and conditional uses. Nooksack's zoning was based on the recommendations from this document.

As mentioned in the first chapter, the GMA requires updating of this information and inclusion of additional elements in the new comprehensive plan.

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~~Figure 2-1. Major Milestones of Original GM Plan Development~~

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## Summary of Plan Development and Public Participation

Nooksack began the process of complying with the GMA late in 1990. The first steps taken were to identify and protect critical areas including wetlands, frequently flooded areas, fish and wildlife habitat, geologically hazardous areas, and critical aquifer recharge areas. By December of 1991 an interim critical areas ordinance was in place.

In the fall of 1991 development of the comprehensive plan got underway. The city hired a consultant planner to help develop the plan. The process was directed by a growth management steering committee with membership from the planning commission, city council, city staff, and citizens at large. The committee met twice a month, reviewing information on population projections, existing land use, and location of flood boundaries. A citizen survey was distributed in February of 1992 and a town meeting was held in March to present the results of the survey and initiate a goal-setting process. The committee incorporated information obtained in the survey and at the town meeting in the goals for the community. These goals then formed the basis for the land-use plan. A first draft plan was published in September, 1992.

### Growth Management Steering Committee Membership, 1991

Maxine Jones, Mayor  
David Dodson, Planning commissioner  
Peter DeBruin, Public works director  
Barbara Burke, Clerk-Treasurer  
Neil MacSwan, Council member  
Matt Gregorich, Citizen at large  
Leonard Soderbom, Citizen at large

In late 1992 the steering committee was disbanded, and the city council began to act in the role of an advisory committee. A staff planner was hired in early 1993, and plan development continued throughout 1993. One major milestone was adoption of county-wide planning policies in the spring of 1993. Identification of an urban growth area was a major task. The city's proposed growth area was submitted to the county in September, 1993, and adopted by the county council in May, 1994. In early 1994 the majority of the plan was complete, and the planner moved on to another job. A second consultant worked on the adoption process, and the plan was adopted in the winter of 1995.

Figure 2-1 shows a timeline of major events in development of the original GM-compliant plan.

In 1997, the Nooksack Comprehensive Plan was updated and revised as needed. In 2000, the City adopted the Nooksack Community Action Plan (CAP) as a supplement to the Comprehensive Plan. The CAP was developed using hundreds of hours of community volunteer time and focused on an area located in and around the downtown core. In 2004, the City reviewed and updated the Comprehensive Plan to comply with RCW 36.70A.130.

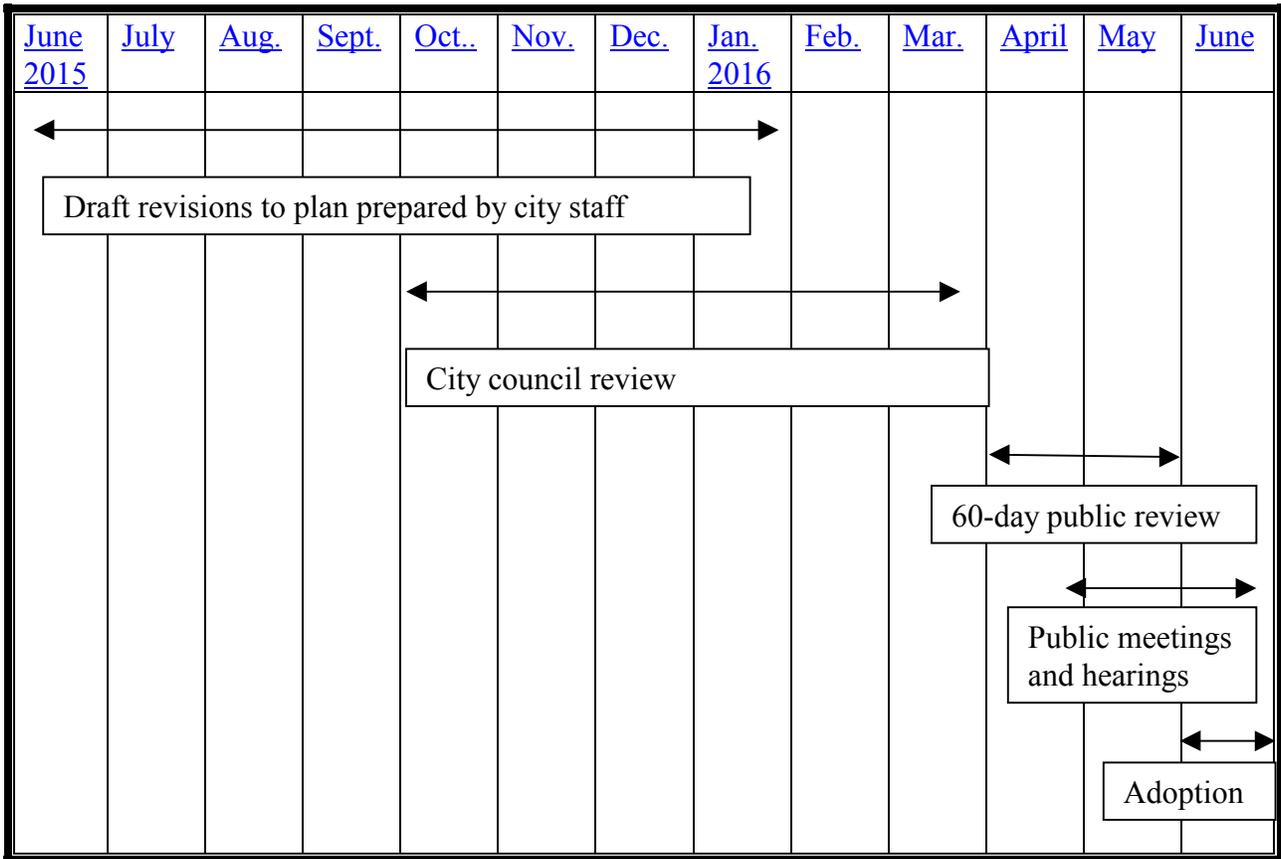
## 2016 Comprehensive Plan

The GMA requires that the comprehensive plan be updated by June 30, 2016. Nooksack began the process of updating its comprehensive plan in 2013. Initial work involved coordinating with staff from Whatcom county and the other cities in the county to develop an overall update schedule, a land capacity analysis methodology and background information. In the fall of 2013, a consultant hired by the county (but paid for by all of the cities as well) prepared high, medium and low projections for population and employment growth in the county through 2036 along with allocations of such growth to all of the UGAs, including Nooksack. In late 2013, following a public hearing before the city council, the city submitted a preliminary proposal to the county that identified the city's proposed allocations of population and employment growth. In early 2014, the Whatcom county council adopted a multi-jurisdictional, non-binding resolution that identified preliminary allocations of population and employment growth to all UGAs and to the area outside the UGAs. The county council allocations were largely based on the preliminary growth allocation proposals received by the county from the seven cities. Through 2014 the county consultant prepared a draft environmental impact statement required by the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) to consider the potential impacts of various growth scenarios. In June 2015, following a public hearing before the city council, the city submitted its final UGA proposal to the county that included proposed allocations of population and employment growth and revisions to the city's UGA boundaries. In July 2015 the county planning commission reviewed the city's UGA proposal and provided suggestions that led the city to modify its UGA proposal.

City staff prepared draft revisions to the comprehensive plan during the summer and fall of 2015 and presented these to the city council beginning in October. During the months of October 2015 through March of 2016 the city council met at regularly scheduled council meetings and reviewed draft revision to the comprehensive plan. The city council provided direction to staff regarding the need for additional revisions.

In April of 2016 the city of Nooksack formally submitted draft revisions to the comprehensive plan to the Washington State Department of Commerce for the mandatory 60-day review as required by RCW 36.70A.106. The proposed plan revisions were also made available to the public at that time. Written and oral comments were received during the comment period and at public meetings and hearings. The city council held public hearings in June 2016 at which time all comments were considered and final action was taken to adopt the 2016 update of the comprehensive plan. Following plan adoption, the revised plan was forwarded to the State. Figure 2-1 shows the steps taken during the 2016 comprehensive plan update process.

Figure 2-1: 2016 Comprehensive Plan Update Timeline



### Survey of Public Opinion

In February of 1992 a resident survey was conducted to identify the needs of the community. Shortly after, the results of the survey were presented at a town meeting. The following is a brief summary of the survey results.

- Most important community goals were:
  1. Increase the number of job opportunities by promoting the growth of business and industry.
  2. Protect the present way of life.
  3. Protect the natural environment.
  
- Most important service needs were:
  1. Improve the community appearance.
  2. Provide sidewalks and bike routes.
  3. Improve recreational services.

- Highest rated services were:
  1. Water quality 80% good to excellent
  2. Sewage disposal 78% good to excellent
  3. Fire protection 77% good to excellent
  4. Sewer services 77% good to excellent
  
- Services needing most improvement were:
  1. Water pressure/street conditions
  2. Street maintenance
  3. Parks
  
- Services people are willing to pay for:
  1. Parks
  2. Street maintenance
  3. Water pressure
  
- Ways to pay for improvements:
  1. Local improvement district 48%
  2. Bonded indebtedness 20%
  3. Increased or new taxes 22%
  
- 75% of the respondents wanted to encourage new business to locate in Nooksack.
- 61% of the respondents said they wanted Nooksack to grow at the present rate. 17% said grow a little slower.
- 50% said growth should occur within present city limits. 33% said growth should occur outside the present city limits.
- 49% thought Nooksack should grow to the east, while 32% thought to the north.
- 87% of the respondents thought lots in Nooksack should stay the same size or be a little larger. Even if taxes would be less as a result of smaller lots, 80% still thought lot size should remain about the same.
- 62% said they are either quite or extremely satisfied with their living arrangements.
- 84% had either no desire or only a slight desire to move.

- 39% thought new houses built were of fair to poor quality. 18% thought new houses built were of average quality. 44% thought new houses built were of good to excellent quality.
- 40% thought there was a great need for single-family homes in Nooksack. 24% thought there was a great need for low-income housing. Only 8% thought there was a great need for apartments and almost no one thought there was a need for mobile homes.
- More people said they participate in walking than in any other activity. Other popular activities were eating out, going to playgrounds, and playing basketball.
- 42% had lived in Nooksack less than four years. 33% had lived in Nooksack over ten years.
- 60% of the respondents live more than 10 miles from their place of work.
- 56% were high school graduates and 31% had completed college.
- 47% had household incomes less than \$30,000.

## Vision and Goals

This chapter presents a vision statement and a number of goals and policies consistent with that vision. Goals and policies included here were developed in 1992 by the growth management steering committee with some revisions in 2000 relating to commercial and industrial development. The initial committee relied heavily on information generated from the survey and town meetings. Revisions were also made with assistance of a survey and town meetings.

Separate lists of goals and policies related to transportation, capital facilities, housing, and utilities are included in other chapters. This chapter lists the over-arching goals for the land-use chapter and the plan as a whole.

### Vision statement

*Nooksack seeks to be a community that provides safe and friendly family living in a small-town rural setting that values the agricultural nature of the surrounding area, protects and takes advantage of the natural environment, encourages the development of new jobs and businesses, and takes pride in community appearance.*

### Goals and policies

*General land-use goal.* ~~Land use should be distributed~~ [To distribute land use](#) in a way that maintains the present way of life, allows for efficient and adequate provision of services, and protects the natural environment.

Policy: The city shall require appropriate mitigation measures where zoning boundaries create a significant conflict in permitted uses. Mitigation measures shall include a physical buffer appropriate to the potential conflict.

*Residential goal.* ~~A~~ To provide a range of residential uses ~~should be provided~~ which protects the character of the community.

Policy: Single-family lot sizes of 9,600 square feet should be maintained in the developed portions of town, while 8,600 square foot lot sizes may be allowed in some of the undeveloped portions of town and in the UGA.

Policy. Multi-family lots should contain ~~an~~ additional 4,800-square feet-footage for each housing unit beyond the first and be placed so as not to ~~not~~ compromise the integrity of ~~a~~ single family neighborhoods.

~~Policy: A mixture of residential, commercial and light industrial uses should be encouraged in the area designated as Business Campus in the Community Action Plan.~~

Policy: Design criteria that fit into the single-family nature of the community should be developed for multi-family housing. Design criteria should include innovative use of open space and height limitations.

*Commercial goal.* ~~Commercial~~ To encourage commercial uses that serve the local community and the surrounding area and seek to provide jobs, enhance the unique rural character of the City and contribute to a well-defined commercial core ~~should be encouraged~~ to enhance and complement the existing commercial zoning along Nooksack Avenue.

Policy: Existing vacant commercial buildings should be encouraged to upgrade in appearance and attract new development.

Policy: Adequate land area to attract new commercial development should be provided.

Policy: Highway commercial zoning regulations should encourage automobile-oriented commercial development to locate along major road corridors.

Policy: Pedestrian-oriented commercial zoning regulation should encourage mixed use commercial development to locate close to the intersection of Madison Street and Nooksack Avenue.

Policy: The development of a vibrant, friendly, and aesthetically pleasing central market district should be encouraged.

*Industrial goal.* ~~Industrial~~ To encourage industrial uses which provide job opportunities for local citizens ~~should be encouraged.~~

- Policy: Adequate land area to attract industrial development should be provided.
- Policy: The location of a light industrial district close to a central market district that will attract a compatible and diverse mix of production-oriented businesses should be encouraged.
- Policy: Industrial development should be located in areas that take advantage of the local transportation network, including SR 9, South Pass Road, and the rail lines.
- Policy: Zoning regulations should be designed to attract industries that provide jobs for citizens and impose minimal impacts on the environment and adjacent properties.

*Agricultural goal.* ~~Agricultural~~ To encourage agricultural and open space uses ~~should be encouraged in the area~~ around the city of Nooksack and in those areas within the city where urban development is limited due to the presence of critical areas.

- Policy: Wetlands, ~~and~~ flood-prone areas and areas potentially impacted by sediments containing naturally occurring asbestos should be encouraged to remain in agricultural use.

*Environmental goals.*

- Goal: To maintain and enhance natural resource-based industries and to encourage the conservation of productive agricultural lands; where more intensive development is inappropriate.
- Goal: To recognize the beneficial uses, functions, and values of wetlands by pursuing a policy of no net loss of wetland acreage and functions and the long-term goal of increasing the quantity and quality of wetlands.
- Goal: To recognize the value of critical recharge areas of aquifers and protect the quantity and quality of the ground water resources.
- Goal: To recognize and respond to the need for flood control and flood resistant building practices within the frequently flooded areas.
- Goal: To protect the public health and safety through the use of land-use regulations in areas which, due to geological hazards, are either not suited or have probable significant limitations to building siting, road construction, or disturbance.
- Goal: To protect the habitat value of those areas providing critical habitat for threatened, endangered, or sensitive wildlife species.

Policy: Best Available Science should be utilized when developing [and updating](#) policies and development regulations to protect the functions and values of critical areas.

Policy: Development proposals should be required to be designed and constructed in accordance with State stormwater management standards and best management practices.

### GMA Planning Goals

In addition to the goals and policies set forth above, the planning goals established in the Growth Management Act (GMA) pursuant to RCW 36.70A.020 are hereby adopted and incorporated by this reference as planning goals under this comprehensive plan. In addition, the policy of the Shoreline Management Act established under RCW 90.58.020 is added as one of the GMA planning goal, without creating any priority order, and is incorporated by this reference into the Nooksack comprehensive plan.

## **Population Projection**

Whatcom County's population has grown significantly in the recent past, increasing from ~~148,300~~127,780 in 1990 to ~~166,826~~166,814 in 2000, and to 201,140 in 2010. These numbers reflect an average annual increase of about 3,903 people in the 1990s and 3,433 in the 2000s and equate to average annual growth rates of ~~4.3~~2.7 percent and 1.9 percent, respectively. The county's population is expected to grow a bit more slowly over the course of the next 20 years, reaching a total of ~~about over 234,917~~275,000 people in ~~2022~~2036.<sup>1</sup> This projection is ~~consistent with~~within the range predicted by the state Office of Financial Management.

Figure 2-2 shows population growth in Nooksack during the past ~~55-65~~ years. After 20 years of stability between 1950 and 1970, Nooksack grew at an annual rate of 3 percent between 1970 and 1990, a rate substantially higher than that experienced by the county during the same time period. Between 1990 and 2000, growth in Nooksack was even more rapid – with an average increase of 28 people per year and an average annual growth rate of 4.3.8 percent per year. From 2000 to 2010, growth in Nooksack was even more rapid, with an average increase of 47 people per year and an average annual growth rate of 4.3 percent. Nooksack's official ~~2004-2015~~ OFM population of ~~910-1,460~~ represents a somewhat slowerreflects continued rapid growth at an average annual growth rate of ~~4.3~~over 3.5 percent per year since 2000 and an average annual increase of 40 people. Growth since 2010 has slowed somewhat, with an average annual increase of 24 people and an average annual growth rate of approximately 1.8%.

In ~~2002~~2013, Whatcom County and the seven cities within the county hired ECONorthwest BERK and Associates (a consulting firm from Seattle) to study projected growth for the incorporated and unincorporated areas of the county. From this study it was determined that Nooksack's population was expected to grow at an average annual rate between ~~2.8~~1.9 and ~~4.0~~2.6 percent during the period from ~~2002-2013~~ to ~~2022~~2036.

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<sup>1</sup> Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan, ~~2004~~2016, ~~Table 5~~.

In 1992, during the visioning process, a majority of residents said that they would like to see growth occur at a pace "similar to that of the preceding 20 years." That pace was 3 percent per year, as mentioned earlier.

In light of the residents' preferences, recent history, and the consultant's projections, **Nooksack adopts a population projection for the year 2022-2036 of 1,881,425** for comprehensive planning purposes based on population growth of 990 people in the City and UGA during the time period from 2013 through 2036. **Whatcom County has also adopted this 2022-2036 population growth figure for Nooksack in the county comprehensive plan for the purpose of coordinating comprehensive planning efforts throughout the county.** This population figure corresponds to an average annual growth rate of 4.12.3 percent and an average annual increase of 43 people per year. This rate is slightly greater-faster (based on average annual increase) than desired by residents, approximately equal to between the "Medium" and "High" rate-projections identified by ECONorthwest-ERK, and about the same as the rate of growth experienced between 1990-2000 and 2000-2015. Figure 2-2 shows the population growth projections through the year 2024.

Figure 2-2. Historic and Projected Population of Nooksack

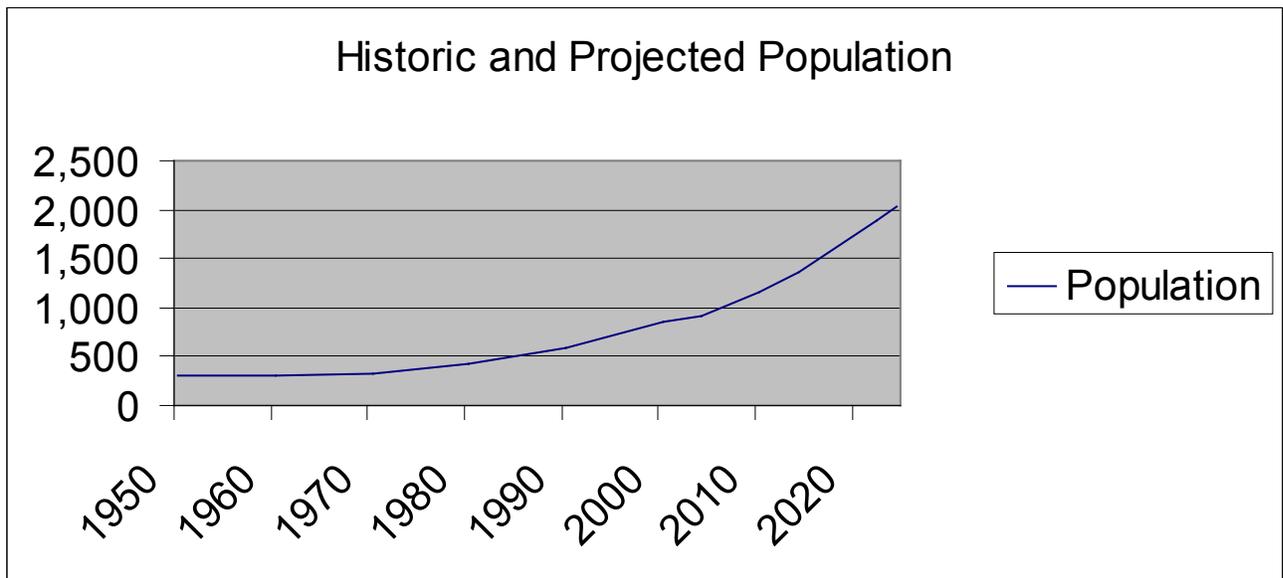


Table 2-1. Adopted Population Projection

| Milestone years   | Estimated population | Number of newcomers |
|---|----------------------|---------------------|
| <del>2000</del> 2010. U.S. Census <u>(City limits only)</u> | <u>8631,338</u>      | -                   |
| <del>2004</del> 2013. Baseline. <u>(City plus UGA)</u>      | <u>9101,435</u>      | -                   |
| <del>2015</del> . OFM. <u>(City limits)</u>                 | <u>1,460</u>         | -                   |
| <del>2010</del> 2022. Six-year capital planning horizon.    | <u>1,1591,782</u>    | <u>249322</u>       |
| <del>2014</del> 2026. Midpoint of planning period.          | <u>1,3621,965</u>    | <u>452505</u>       |
| <del>2022</del> . <del>County plan horizon year.</del>      | <u>1,881</u>         | <u>971</u>          |
| <del>2024</del> 2036. Planning period.                      | <u>2,0392,425</u>    | <u>1,129965</u>     |

Table 2-1 shows the projected city population at milestone planning years, based upon the population growth figures adopted by Whatcom County.

### **Employment Projection**

Based on the report prepared by BERK and Associates in 2013, Whatcom County has projected that the Nooksack employment base will increase by 115 jobs over the course of the planning period. The City of Nooksack has been allocated employment growth of 115 jobs through the year 2036.