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From: Ann Beck-Witte <abwitte@cal.berkeley.edu>
Sent: Tuesday, June 13, 2017 8:36 PM
To: Ingrid Gabriel
Subject: Population Projection Comments From Beck Witte (San Juan County)

To: San Juan County Planning Commission via IngridG@sanjuanco.com

From: V. Ann Beck Witte
227 Bromley Drive
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Date: June 13, 2017

Re: Population Projection Comments From Beck Witte

Greetings.

I have read the Comp Plan and the county's 4/11/17 2036 Comp Plan Update Population Projection. The projection is an approximation and the county is projecting a total population for San Juan County 19,423 for 2036. Migration has been highlighted as the major population factor. In brainstorming, herein are listed other factors which could also affect migration:

- Economic boom or downturn (With boom population increases whereas with downturn population increases.)
- Political instability (Islands may seem a refuge-population increase.)
- Epidemic/Pandemic (Population decrease everywhere.)
- Climate Change (Islands may receive climate refugees-population increase.)
- Lack of "Affordable Housing" (Lack of subsidized housing-population decrease.)
- Lack of medical services (Decrease of aging population.)
- Pollution event in local waters (Population decrease.)
- Prolonged disruption or reduction in ferry service due to economics or other WA state issue (Population decrease.)
- Technological improvements creating increase in telecommuting (Population increase.)
- "San Juan Islands: The Hottest Luxury-Home Market In the Country" 5/19/17 Wall St Journal link<http://www.msn.com/en-us/money/realestate/san-juan-islands-the-hottest-luxury-home-market-in-the-country/ar-BBBgSGf?li=BBmkt5R&ocid=spartanntp>

(This article suggests a population increase in the luxury home sector which translates to an increase in gentrification and a decrease in community economic diversity. This change likely causes the effect of an increase in non-UGA buildout and therefore an increase in non-UGA population which in turn increases sprawl. The pace at which this occurs is unknown and could snowball.)

- Disasters locally (Earthquake, tsunami, fire, flood, drought, something else destroying water or other needed resources-population decrease here.)
- Disasters on mainland (Earthquake, tsunami, fire, flood, something else destroying water or other needed resources-population could increase here as we may see refugees or it could decrease here also as the islands are dependent on the mainland.)
- Decreased non-luxury housing prices (Population increases.)
- Increased non-luxury housing prices (Population decreases.)
- Nearby largest city/largest county population trends. The Seattle government website in mid- May, 2017 listed population as: 1990-516,259; 2000-563,374 (a 7.9% increase); and 2010-608,660 (an 8% increase from 2000). The King County government website in mid-May, 2017 listed population as: 1990-1,500,000; 2000-1,737,075(a 15.8% increase); and 2010-1,931,249 (an 11% increase from 2000). (This growth level might suggest a higher population growth level here and almost certainly a higher visitor population level as well.)

More importantly, when you review population projection numbers in the Comp Plan, please study and list full build-out population potential. Identifying full build-out population now, rather than later, does the following:

- Allows potential future problems to be headed off before they become too big to fix. (An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.)
- The community and the county are unable to have a meaningful dialogue of potential future population without this data.
- Along with a much needed carrying capacity study this data will allow understanding at what population point San Juan County exceeds its resource budget. By carrying capacity study I mean a study of the population which is able to be supported indefinitely by its supporting systems (resource budget). I have been wondering if we have exceeded our carrying capacity in the following:
 - Salt water intrusion in wells.
 - Using ground water faster than aquifers are recharged.
 - Lack of parking spaces in Eastsound on Memorial Day weekend.
 - Local orca population declining.
 - A booked flight for an islander I met became unavailable due to weather. The islander drove to Anacortes and the ferry was full. He needed to walk on the ferry in order to get home (leaving his car in Anacortes).
 - Calls to local marinas showed they are full for certain boat sizes.
- Identifying full build-out population will allow San Juan County to understand the water budget more realistically. The source of water in San Juan County is aquifers. There are many examples of wells that have salt water intrusion. Some places truck in water. Just how much more population can be added given the unique nature of the San Juan Islands and drinking water? Desalination has been touted as a solution to the water “shortage”. There is controversy in the currently available desalination technology.

- To stay consistent with the Vision Statement, potential full build-out population needs to be identified. From the Vision Statement’s second paragraph, “The drinking water supply is clean and adequate.”
- GMA (Growth Management Act) principle 10. Environment- deals with protecting the environment and enhancing the state’s high quality of life, including air and water quality, and the availability of water. To determine the availability of water the county will need to project the population that needs the water. Projecting full-build out potential population will allow the county to better understand potential water needs ahead of time and make any needed course adjustments.
- Projecting potential full build-out population helps keep San Juan County working within the guidelines of the GMA regarding reducing sprawl and encouraging growth within the UGAs. From the county’s 4/11/17 Comp Plan Update Population Projection document on page 25: “Approximately 72%, 82%, 93% of the population of San Juan, Orcas, Lopez respectively live in areas beyond the UGAs. Including Friday Harbor the UGAs house 22% of the County’s population. In contrast, 68% of neighboring Whatcom County’s population lives in the UGAs”. Figure 12 on page 32 of this report shows a projected trend where Eastsound will gradually accommodate 50% of Orcas’ growth. Identifying full build-out population and undeveloped areas in the rural, non-UGA areas and monitoring changes in this data at regular time intervals will give the county additional data to adjust the direction if needed. Luxury homes are in the non-UGA areas and if the luxury home trend continues the county population could become even more heavily weighted in the non-UGA areas.
- Projecting potential full build-out population helps San Juan County to stay within the first paragraph of the Vision Statement, “We envision a community that is primarily rural..” In reviewing the county’s GIS system with a friend helping me who is able to do this, he has obtained this data:
Rural lands (rural farm forest, rural residential, rural commercial and rural industrial) plus some “dual land use parcels” that include a few Forest and Ag resource lands and some assorted other parcels consume:

57,455 acres and comprise 11,809 parcels with a current overall density of 1 du/4.87 acres out of 17,203 total parcels in the county, as of Jan. 2017.

Thus these rural lands parcels represent ~69% of the total parcels in SJC and ~51% of total county acreage. (Note: there are~30,000 acres of resource lands separate from “rural” lands.)

The state of Washington owns another ~10,000 acres scattered across a whole bunch of land use categories. Moran State Park takes up almost 5,000 acres. Here is an example of data anomaly: MSP is listed with a land use category of “P” in one database and “C” (conservancy) in another.

Of these 11,809 rural lands parcels, 8,590 are non-conforming. This represents ~73% of all rural lands parcels. The average density of these parcels is 1 du/ 1.88 acres.

In the process itself of looking at parcel data to project full build-out population data, patterns and data will become visible to the county. The county can then take measures to ensure it either is rural or changes the Vision Statement to reflect what it is.

- Projecting potential full build-out population is essential for resilience and disaster preparedness. It takes time to make a good plan and to put in place resources to support the plan. Potential future build-out population will allow the county to stay far enough ahead with respect to a disaster recovery plan.
- Projecting full-build out population data adds a level of transparency that is currently missing in the appendix of the Comp Plan. To really understand the comp plan, citizens need to be able to access this data easily and preferably in a visual manner as well as in written form.
- Projecting full-build out population helps SJC stay within its Capital Facilities plan. The 5/24/2004 Cost of Community Services in San Juan County prepared by the Friends concludes that for every \$1.00 of property tax revenue it costs \$1.32 to support a residential dwelling unit. It would be prudent for the county to know just how much will need to be subsidized.
- All of us bear responsibility for the planet. Understanding our *potential* future population helps us to find ways to be better stewards of the natural environment.

Peak season population needs to be studied in more depth-please do so.

- This is a challenge to study, however, visitors place demands on the system that need to be addressed- water, safety, sewage, garbage, ferries, roads, other goods and services.
- Are ferry numbers studied in the Comp Plan appendix during the non-peak months as well as the peak months? (I was only able to find peak numbers.) As a factor to identify peak season versus non-peak season population I would think non-peak season numbers are needed also.
- Maybe local markets can advise how much additional food they purchase during peak season and a percent increase can be assigned in this way?
- On Memorial Day weekend the crowds in Eastsound, especially at the Farmer's Market, didn't seem just double the winter population-8 to 10 times the winter population would be my very rough guess just eyeballing things. Is there a way to quantify this? Perhaps the managers of local Farmer's Markets track numbers?
- If the consultants are going to study peak-season data and the Comp Plan time-line is going to be met, doesn't this need to happen now?
- The 4/11/17 2036 Comp Plan Update Population Projection report, on page 40 says that in 2015 there were 813,000 visitors. Is there a way to track how many visited during peak season (Memorial Day to Labor Day?) Is there a way to track the most visitors that were here in any one day?
- San Juan County is very dependent on tourism. If the population becomes so large that the island is no longer perceived as wild then fewer tourists will come. This would cause serious economic damage. Some backpacking trails have hiker limits. National Parks have visitor limits. It is likely not desirable economically for SJC to limit the daily number of visitors. By understanding full-build out population along with peak-season visitor data, SJC is able to make changes to keep the county "wild" enough to support tourism.

You have a tough and important job. I appreciate what you do. Thank you for your attention to these important matters that will affect all of our lives going forward.

Best Regards,

V. Ann Beck Witte