

Donna DePamphilis

From: Sandi Friel <sandi@rockisland.com>
Sent: Wednesday, June 14, 2017 3:43 AM
To: Ingrid Gabriel
Cc: 'Kevin Ranker'
Subject: Population Projection Comments from Friel

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

From: Sandi Friel
548 Karen Lane
Deer Harbor WA

Date: June 13, 2017

Dear San Juan County Planning Commissioners,

Thank you for allowing me to provide an opinion on the Population Projections. I think the overall methodology for the DCD's population projection appears solid in terms of complying with GMA requirements. I have the following comments to be considered:

1. Since (a) The projections are based on OFM GMA projection data that is more than five years old, (b) OFM will be releasing its updated population projections in three months and (c) the County's projections are required to be consistent with the OFM projected range, the County may want to consider holding off selecting its 2036 population projection until after OFM releases its next projections in September.
2. There are a few immeasurable but nevertheless influential factors that may be worthy of throwing into the mix, potentially suggesting a higher year-round population than is forecasted:
 - The county's increase in fiber optic internet service is making it easy than ever for telecommuters to relocate to the islands. Though I've read that the county's fastest growing demographic is 65 and older, in my real estate business I'm also seeing a trend towards younger buyers, many who plan to telecommute for some years prior to retirement.
 - Improved medical services may keep older people choosing to remain in the islands for a longer time than in the past. In addition, according to OFM, the state's average lifespan for both males and females is expected to increase by three and four years respectively over the period 2016 to 2040.

- The islands seem to be getting increasingly more publicity on a national level. The more people know about it, the more visitors which also leads to more residents -- most people moving here were once visitors.
 - Seattle-area is our biggest supply of home buyers. A recent headline: "Seattle region's population growing at historic pace, making biggest annual gain in a century." Though it's expected the region's *rate* of growth will slow down after a few years, the actual numbers of people moving to the Seattle area will continue to grow significantly every year.
 - As Seattle experiences more gridlock and hurried pace, the islands would be expected to be an even greater draw for weekend escapees. Our county population projections are based on a percentage of the state's overall population... perhaps Seattle-area population should also be evaluated for population projections in the islands?
 - The ferry reservation system has removed much of the hassle factor of getting here.
 - The increase in transient rental homes has added more visitor accommodations. If the increase in accommodations has led to an increase in visitors, more visitors translates to more second-homers and more future residents.
3. A fundamental flaw in the OFM projections is that it doesn't have a provision for consideration of seasonal population increases which seems critical for a resort and second-home destination such as the San Juans. As the population projection drives many elements of the comprehensive plan and the visitor and seasonal-resident impact puts great strain on transportation, parking, energy, environment, water supply, emergency services, etc. it seems logical that this population increase needs to be factored into planning purposes. If this temporary population increase puts the projections above the OFM projections, the county can petition OFM for the increase based on sound reasoning, if it makes sense to do so.
 4. The County's technical memorandum is lacking in visitor population numbers. It states "There is no irrefutable method for determining the number of overnight visitors who come to the islands in the summer months." It would be fairly straightforward to estimate the influx of people by designing a survey system geared to separate residents from visitors, for example, via the ferry reservation system. It seems like a critical number for planning. Peak population appears inadequately addressed in the county's population projection.
 5. It's important to remember while rates of growth may sound small, growth is exponential. A 2% growth rate equals a doubling in population in 35 years. If our population in the summer months is indicative of what year-round population might be in the future, and our typical

current summer population is half of what it could eventually be, then at some point while marching toward this number the San Juan Islands will have lost its magic, our quality of life and quality of visitor experience eroded, and surely the CP vision statement will be unfulfilled. I've not talked to a single person who's in favor of this scenario and am not sure what to do about this conundrum, but it's worthy of community study: how do we control growth, for example, encouraging the type of growth and tourism that will be softer on our natural resources and capital facilities, while discouraging growth that is higher-impact and more detrimental to the community and environment? How, as a rural county, do we limit growth in rural areas to fulfill the GMA goal (and our community's goal) of preventing sprawl by funneling growth to UGA? As Orcas's growth rate outside Eastsound has been 4:1 over the period 2010-2016, is it time for a moratorium on rural subdivisions while we figure this out? How do we ensure that the most impactful consumers are paying their fair share? How do we avoid further becoming a gentrified population and enable artists, musicians, teachers, farmers and laborer's to afford to live here? How do we determine limits on certain finite resources such as drinking water, and then impose those limits, equitably? How do we determine an ideal sustainable population number and then say, 'no more'? Or do we? Big questions that require thinking out of the box, beyond GMA mandates. I hope that our county will take the time and effort to allow our community to have these important conversations, guided by experts, so that together we can craft a plan that truly embodies how we want to grow, then put policies and checkpoints in place to monitor our progress.

6. Though we are following GMA guidelines in projecting population and planning for a 20-year timeline, it's prudent that we look beyond that horizon, especially considering the physical limitations of our tiny islands. Note that my pro-growth home state of Florida, after litigation regarding Monroe County's Comprehensive Plan, issued an Executive Order calling for the preparation of a "carrying capacity analysis" for the Florida Keys:

"The [carrying capacity] analysis shall be based upon the findings adopted by the Administration Commission on December 12, 1995, or more recent data that may become available in the course of the study, and shall be based upon the benchmarks of, and all adverse impacts to, the Keys land and water natural systems, in addition to the impacts of nutrients on marine resources. The carrying capacity analysis shall consider aesthetic, socioeconomic (including sustainable tourism), quality of life and community character issues, including the concentration of population, the amount of open space, diversity of habitats, and species richness. The analysis shall reflect the interconnected nature of the Florida Keys' natural systems, but may consider and analyze the carrying capacity of specific islands or groups of islands and specific ecosystems or habitats, including distinct parts of the Keys' marine ecosystem."

With the San Juan Islands being touted the crown jewels of Washington State, perhaps our state would help fund a carrying capacity analysis to help guide our decisions on growth. At the very least it might be insightful to obtain a samples of carrying capacity studies for other islands that we could learn from.

Thank you for allowing me to comment.

Sincerely,

Sandi Friel