

Date: July 22, 2024  
To: King County Growth Management Planning Council (GMPC)  
From: Joint Rural Area Team [\*]  
Subject: Growth Target Reconciliation Process

## INTRODUCTION

At the June 26 GMPC Meeting your Interjurisdictional Team (IJT) presented a proposed Growth Target Reconciliation Process (*Agenda Item IV*). Herein we provide Comment on the IJT's proposal and possible implementation.

We recognize jurisdictional Growth Targets essentially constitute policy statements on numbers related to both housing units and jobs to be planned for within each respective comprehensive plan. We are aware that in 2021 and 2022 the Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs) were amended to adopt Growth Targets for ongoing 2024 comprehensive plan updates. Finally, we understand CPP Policy states:

***DP-14(d)*** All jurisdictions shall accommodate housing and employment by:  
*d) Ensuring adopted local water, sewer, transportation, utility, and other infrastructure plans and investments, including special purpose district plans, are consistent in location and timing with adopted targets as well as regional and countywide plans.*

This calls for jurisdictions to provide sufficient capacity at appropriate densities for the targets and allocated housing need, consistent with the *VISION 2050 Regional Growth Strategy*. We consider this critical to any Growth Target Reconciliation Process being contemplated and, if *adopted*, certainly how such a process is *implemented*.

## DISCUSSION

We have concerns with developing and using a Growth Target Reconciliation Process and generally agree with the *Cons* of such a process as described in the June 26 GMPC meeting by IJT Lead, Rebecca Maskin.

That said, should such a Growth Target Reconciliation Process be developed and implemented, we have major concerns with the request by the City of Black Diamond—a City in the Rural Area—for a large increase in its Growth Targets. Below, aligned with the major points discussed at the June 26 GMPC meeting [which includes our highlighting], we provide our **comments along with supporting rationale**:

- A. The IJT provided its *“initial recommendation on guiding principles and a reconciliation process to resolve jurisdictional inconsistencies between growth assumptions used in comprehensive plans and growth targets adopted in the Countywide Planning Policies.”*

**The IJT has thought this out well and specifically comment on the IJT's "guiding principles" in paragraph J. below.**

- B. "The Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs) related to growth targets to adopt targets were amended in 2021 and 2022 to adopt targets for the 2024 comprehensive plan periodic update and to update and clarify how jurisdictions plan for their growth targets."

**This was a long collaborative process, as also mentioned during GMPC discussions at the June 26 GMPC meeting.**

- C. "Coordination among jurisdictions in developing and planning for growth targets is essential to achieving shared countywide and regional planning goals. An individual jurisdiction's planning for housing and employment, transportation, and public services demand affects neighboring communities and the county and region as a whole."

**This cannot be over emphasized, as inter-jurisdictional impacts are real and costly.**

- D. "...in 2021 CPP DP-13(c) was amended to allow GMPC to create a process to amend growth targets after the periodic plan update, reconciling them with plan growth assumptions to ensure consistency between plans and the CPPs. The policy states:

**DP-13** The Growth Management Planning Council shall:...

- c) Create a coordinated countywide process to reconcile and set growth targets that implements the Regional Growth Strategy through countywide shares of regional housing and job growth, countywide shares of statewide housing needs, allocations to Regional Geographies, and individual jurisdictional growth targets.]

**Once again, we emphasize any growth target reconciliation process must implement the VISION 2050 Regional Growth Strategy.**

- E. "...GMPC has not previously elected to reconcile growth targets with plan growth assumptions after plans have been adopted. A reconciliation process could increase consistency between comprehensive plans and the CPPs, and potentially help jurisdictions achieve certification during the Puget Sound Regional Council's plan review process. It also has the potential to disrupt local planning for growth targets already underway in the 2024 periodic update."

**During Black Diamond's 2015 Comprehensive Plan Update (which culminated in its 2019 published plan), in late 2021, early 2022, it failed to obtain PSRC full certification due to the recognized inconsistencies among its growth, transportation, and funding elements, thus not meeting GMA-stipulated requirement that comprehensive plans be "internally consistent."**

**Unfortunately, such internal element inconsistencies have not been rectified. In fact, not much has changed for the better, only for the worse, as the city contemplates further development not related to its MPDs in its 2024 Comprehensive Plan Update.**

F. *The IJT conducted outreach to King County jurisdictions in April and May to assess the need for a reconciliation process. The outreach revealed that three cities were likely or intending to use growth assumptions in their plans that differ from adopted Growth Targets.”*

***One of these cities, Black Diamond, requested an increase more than doubling its growth target from 2,900 to 6,000 [not a typo!]. Please note, the current 2,900 growth target agreed to during the 2021 CPP process itself represented a large increase from the city’s prior 1,900 growth target.***

G. *“All three cities are cities in the rural area or at the edge of the contiguous UGA and are categorized in the Cities and Towns Regional Geography in VISION 2050. Currently, the combined growth targets for the Cities and Towns Regional Geography exceeds the share of growth allocated to that geography in the VISION 2050 Regional Growth Strategy.”*

***Again, it cannot be over emphasized that any growth target reconciliation process must implement the VISION 2050 Regional Growth Strategy.***

H. *“Growth targets were established through a deliberative process to coordinate accommodating future growth across jurisdictions. While a reconciliation process extends this coordination through comprehensive planning back to the CPPs, it could also be seen or used as a means for circumventing the shared compact the adopted growth targets represent.”*

***We could not agree more!***

I. *“Two of the cities that have indicated that they intend to use growth assumptions that differ from adopted targets contain large planned residential developments that have been built out or are under construction. Planned developments commonly have covenants restricting or limiting further development, which could limit the ability to accommodate new growth.”*

***Black Diamond does have planned communities that are way behind schedule of being built-out.***

***However, it also has Conditions of Approval (COA) in the underlying MPD permits that allow detailed traffic-demand modeling and analyses at any point, as deemed by the city, that can require additional traffic mitigation (or a reduction in number of units)—our highlighting below:***

***COA 17a. “At the point where building permits have been issued for 850 dwelling units at the Villages and Lawson Hills together, and again at such phase or interval determined by the City Council following completion of the review called for by this condition, the City shall validate and calibrate the new transportation demand model created pursuant to Condition 11 above for the then-existing traffic from the Villages and Lawson Hills together. The calibration may include an assumption for internal trip capture rates as set forth in Condition 14 above, rather than actual internal trip capture rates, if an insufficient amount of commercial development has been constructed at the time of the validation/calibration required herein. The City shall***

then run the model to estimate the trip distribution percentages that will result from the next upcoming phase or interval of MPD development, and to assign the estimated trips from that phase or interval to the intersections identified in Condition 11 above.” **[Note: COA 17 has ten subparagraphs, with b. through j., providing even more details that give the city flexibility related to traffic-demand modeling and analyses.]**

**This is the city's “out.” Such COAs, specifically, were placed on the MPD permits because the original traffic-demand modeling and analyses were rejected by the city's Hearing Examiner (circa 2010/2011) and the City Council chose, at that time, to not require they be redone before issuing the permits. Unfortunately, this has proved to be a major mistake!**

**Furthermore, the city did not require its MPD Master Developer to mitigate any generated traffic impacts outside its city limits—a serious failure. Although mitigation agreements were signed between the Master Developer and the cities of Covington and Maple Valley circa 2010/2011, they were grossly insufficient (and now proven so), not based on any approved traffic-demand model and analyses, and only offered after Maple Valley threatened to sue. However, although COA 17 traffic-demand modeling and analyses could include recommendations for mitigation external to the City, there is no apparent linkage to fixed Maple Valley or Covington Traffic Mitigation Agreements. Another major flaw.**

**Not only are the MPD Development Agreements not properly mitigated, the city also continues to approve permits for other large developments that have nothing to do with its MPDs. These additional developments currently add about another ~1,000 dwelling units to the city's future totals. Traffic and other mitigation agreements have not been made public, but in any case are not known to address any impacts beyond city borders. The willingness of the city to approve additional developments beyond the MPD's, even while requesting a lesser total of growth targets from the GMPC, should be a matter of great concern.**

**Finally, the Black Diamond 15-yr Development Agreements with its MPD Master Developer expire in a little more than a year in November 2025.**

J. IJT-Recommended guiding principles **(highlighted in yellow below are edits/changes made by the IJT in response to June 26, 2024, GMPC comments, that are included in the July 24, 2024, meeting packet):**

1. “Reconciliation/amendments may be pursued when significant changes to the planning framework or local circumstances **that could not have been anticipated have occurred** since target adoption have occurred.”

**In the case of the City of Black Diamond's request for a large increase in its growth targets nothing has changed. in fact, during the 2021 CPP process it received a 70+ % increase of its previous growth target (as described under our paragraph F. above). the city's “6,000 unit” request is not new.**

2. “Reconciliation/amendments may be allowed where adherence to the adopted targets creates a conflict with other GMA goals (e.g., environmental issues, infrastructure to serve growth).”

**Unfortunately, the City of Black Diamond's request for a large increase in its growth targets directly conflicts with GMA goals, specifically the two enumerated here—(1) deleterious environmental impacts caused by increased pollution and carbon emissions and (2) lack of infrastructure to serve such growth.**

3. “Jurisdictions are responsible for demonstrating need, consistent with the threshold and principles for reconciliation, for the requested target change.”

**Black Diamond has demonstrated no need that requires circumventing the VISION 2050 Regional Growth Strategy.**

4. “Jurisdictions should directly request reconciliation or amendment of their target.”
5. “Amended targets must further King County’s alignment with the Regional Growth Strategy and protect the integrity of the growth target setting process.”

**VISION 2050 does not call for or envision such growth, as requested by the city of black diamond, in “cities in the rural area.” as stated under paragraph G. above on p. 3:**

**“Currently, the combined growth targets for the Cities and Towns Regional Geography exceeds the share of growth allocated to that geography in the VISION 2050 Regional Growth Strategy.”**

**The City of Black Diamond's request does nothing to “further King County's alignment with the VISION 2050 Regional Growth Strategy.” in fact, it would do just the opposite!**

6. “GMPC staff will coordinate with PSRC and Commerce to minimize any risks to plan certification.”

**We expect that Black Diamond's 2024 Comprehensive Plan Update will again not be granted full PSRC certification, whether its growth targets are increased or not, as it still has the same inconsistencies as enumerated in our paragraph E above.**

7. “Growth targets should only be redistributed when may not be reduced to avoid planning for countywide housing needs are addressed.”

8. “Reconciliation should limit impacts to jurisdictions not requesting amended targets.”

***The impacts of Black Diamond’s planned growth (~quintupling its population) are enormous and will affect vast portions of the transportation infrastructure of southeast King County.***

***When the MPDs were being evaluated by city’s Hearing Examiner and the City Council, testimonies by King County, the City of Maple Valley, and WSDOT all were against such gigantic MPDs (i.e., a quintupling of the city’s population!). The cities of Maple Valley and Covington threatened to sue and later came to separate “Mitigation Agreements” with the Master Developer.***

***Further, such impacts are compounded by the City of Black Diamond not asking for an increase in its jobs target of 680. this, coupled with the fact the city most likely will not even reach that 680 jobs target, will further cause the vast majority of its projected 20,000+ new residents to commute outside of the city to jobs. This ,in turn, will have large impacts on every arterial to and from Black Diamond, e.g., SR-169, Auburn-Black Diamond Road, Kent-Black Diamond Road, Covington-Sawyer Road, Green Valley Road, and Issaquah-Hobart Road – Ravensdale Black Diamond Road. In fact, all these arterials already have large traffic impacts.***

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Our interest here, as a Joint Team of King County Rural Area Unincorporated Area Councils and Associations, is that the request by the City of Black Diamond—a City in the Rural Area—for vastly increased Growth Targets *directly* affects our Rural Area organizations/associations and the residents living and commuting in our respective areas. This primarily is due to the untenable traffic volumes to be produced and the impact on King County roads that we, in the unincorporated areas, exclusively pay to improve and maintain.

That said, the City’s request *also* directly affects all cities in southeast King County including Auburn, Renton, Maple Valley, Covington, and Issaquah, as they will be burdened with large *through-traffic* increases and no mitigation to pay to accommodate same. Please note that the monies received by Maple Valley in its “*Mitigation Agreement*” with the MPD Master Developer already nearly are exhausted (and those “*improvements*” already nearly overwhelmed) with much, much more MPD development to come!

Therefore, we conclude the following:

1. We support the IJT’s eight recommended Guiding Principles enumerated in paragraph J. above. They are sound and ensure alignment with the State’s *Growth Management Act* and PSRC’s *VISION 2050*.
2. We agree the threshold bar must be set high for such changes. However, we also do not believe such a process is warranted, as it essentially undermines the existing coordinated Growth Target process.

3. We do not see how such a process could strengthen commitment to the Regional Growth Strategy, especially in the case of the City of Black Diamond’s request, as it represents a “U-Turn” from that strategy.
4. Finally, a Growth Target Reconciliation Process could open a “Pandora’s Box,” where other cities will seek to make such requests, again undermining the exiting process.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The July 24, 2024, GMPC meeting packet Agenda Item VII. *Growth Target Reconciliation Process* includes the following potential options the GMPC may pursue:
  - “1) accept all claims for reconciliation and amend the Countywide Planning Policies,”
  - “2) accept claims consistent with policy and principles for reconciliation and deny others, and amend the Countywide Planning Policies as needed, or”
  - “3) not pursue reconciliation.”

We recommend option 3).

2. The GMPC, should it agree with a Reconciliation Process (to be developed by the IJT under its direction), we recommend it carefully implement same when it comes to the Cities’ requests before it.
3. If the GMPC agrees to implement a Reconciliation Process, we recommend end it should clearly find the City of Black Diamond’s request to be completely unreasonable and fails to meet most, if not all, of the IJT’s eight recommended Guiding Principles enumerated in paragraph J. above.
4. We fully support the June 21, 2024 letter from the *Friends of Black Diamond* to the GMPC. The key points therein were well researched and its “*Closing and Request*” follow the facts and the data uncovered in that research. We have been following work of the *Friends of Black Diamond* since its inception and find it a very credible organization, which continually provides useful information to both policymakers and the Public.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns, conclusions, and recommendations. We are available to answer any questions.

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