



A drive down Hwy 527 illustrates the population boom that has occurred recently in Mill Creek. City officials are working to rein in population growth through 2025.

Enterprise/DUSTY LOCKE

City challenges county on GMA growth projections

By Jana Hill

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The population in Mill Creek will grow by 2025, but if the city has its way, it won't grow as much as the county recently projected it would.

The city and Snohomish County are currently hammering out the details on population forecasts tied to Washington state's Growth Management Act (GMA).

Population targets handed down by the county are significantly higher than expected by the city.

"We have so few parcels left," said Bill Trimm, Mill Creek community development director. "Our projection is going to be two to three thousand less than population forecasts."

Mill Creek's current population

"I want fewer apartment complexes in the future."

Terry Ryan
Mill Creek Mayor

is approximately 11,000. The city anticipates that it will be able to grow, within its current city limits, to a population of 16,089 total, Trimm said.

The forecast of 16,089 does not include population growth in surrounding areas, within the city's urban growth area (UGA). The UGA is land surrounding a city that the city expresses interest in annexing someday.

The purpose of population targets is to assure government services are not overburdened, and environmentally sensitive lands

are preserved, Trimm said.

Populations are manipulated with land use and density policies set by government bodies. Municipalities determine population through their comprehensive plans.

Other areas that can be overburdened by high population densities needed to accommodate rapid growth are schools, roads, parks and transportation systems.

Mill Creek Mayor Terry Ryan is scheduled to present the city's position on population forecasts to Snohomish County Tomorrow (SCT) on Wednesday March 26 (after Enterprise deadline). The SCT is a decision-making body that oversees growth issues for the county.

He is concerned about the impacts of higher population den-

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sities.

"We're not going to change our density any" more than we already have, Ryan said. "I want fewer apartment complexes in the future."

Higher population densities at apartment complexes overload schools and contribute to traffic problems that are already an issue in Mill Creek.

Ryan said the city is basing its numbers on the county's Buildable Lands Report. The Buildable Lands Report is a county document that spells out population projections. Population forecasting numbers handed down by the county exceed numbers in its own report.

Steve Toy, principal demographer for Snohomish County, said that is because the report and the process for population forecasting are "two different processes." The Buildable Lands report is based on comprehensive plans passed in 2012, while the current process looks to 2025.

"That's 13 years out into the future," Toy said.

Ryan said he expects to get those numbers reduced after presenting to SCT.

"It's a big county. I'm sure they'll find somewhere" to put those population densities, Ryan said. Low and high population targets are handed down to counties by the state's Office

of Financial Management. Counties then dole out targets to cities within their jurisdictions.

Toy said the targets given to Mill Creek are part of a draft process, and stressed that the process is a collaborative one.

"We anticipated that there would be corrections needed so all Mill Creek has to do is review growth targets and get back to us," Toy said.

The county has asked cities to give feedback on population targets by April 1, Toy said.

The county was given a population range with a low end at 800,000 and a high end at 1,065,000 that it has to fall within, Toy said.

When the population forecasting process is complete, the county's total forecast will have to fall into the range given by the state's Office of Financial Management in order for the county to be in compliance with the GMA.

If the majority of cities in the county responded like Mill Creek has, saying there is not enough space to accommodate growth, the SCT would probably review the numbers again, Toy said. However, no feedback has been received to date, and that outcome is not expected.

"That's a pretty wide range, about a quarter million difference in population," Toy said.