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Governor lauds countywide planning efforts

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MOUNT VERNON — An effort to plan for population growth in Skagit County has been lauded by Gov. Chris Gregoire.

Envision Skagit 2060, which has involved citizen input and local elected officials, was one of two projects selected statewide for the governor's Smart Vision Award.

La Conner Mayor Ramon Hayes said the award shows the plan is "on the right track."

"We have our own communities and that's important, but at a larger level, we have to find opportunities to work together to push the county forward," he said.

The Envision Skagit 2060 project was recognized for the work done between 2009 and 2011, which culminated in the release of a citizens committee report in October. Twelve residents crafted the report, which included recommendations for cities to merge services to save money. The report also suggested the communities within Skagit County work together to market industrial lands to large-scale manufacturers.

Skagit County Commissioner Ken Dahlstedt said the award is a testament to the citizens committee. Members spent dozens of hours researching and touring Skagit County over the course of nine months.

"The citizens were donating their time ... I think (the award) is a tremendous recognition to them," Dahlstedt said.

Envision Skagit 2060 was paid for with two federal grants totaling \$1.4 million. Local governments have supplemented that amount with \$750,000.

This is the second time in three years the governor has lauded Skagit County for its community planning efforts. In 2010, the county's Urban Growth Area Open Space Plan received the Smart Vision Award for comprehensive planning.

For more information on Envision Skagit 2060, visit www.skagitcounty.net/envisionskagit.