

Date: Jun 15, 2011; Section: Front Page; Page: A1

# Residents invited to comment on Envision Skagit ideas

By **AARON BURKHALTER**

## Staff Writer

Community leaders have reacted with a mix of skepticism and support to recommendations for how to guide Skagit County's growth over the next 50 years.

As for the suggestion of the Envision Skagit Citizen Committee that Mount Vernon and Burlington become one city, responses have ranged from "You've got to be kidding me!" to "I've been saying that for years!"

County residents will have a chance to express their opinions on the committee's work at a public meeting Thursday.

The recommendations outline different ways the county could accommodate growing by 100,000 more residents over the next 50 years. The recommendations include designating 1,600 acres of land for industrial use, no net loss to agricultural acreage, and finding ways to have at least 90 percent of the new population in the cities, minimizing rural growth.

Mount Vernon City Councilman Dale Ragan said it's an important document that should be taken seriously. He highlighted one recommendation calling for more cooperation between county and city governments.

Ragan, who is running for mayor in Mount Vernon, said merging his home city with Burlington may be a challenge. "That's going to be all uphill," Ragan said Monday, adding that it should still be considered.

"It's becoming more and more difficult for individual (municipalities) to support the specific things property owners expect," Ragan said.

Sedro-Woolley City Councilman Brett Sandstrom said limiting growth to the cities makes sense.

"They are supposed to be the population center," Sandstrom said. "I think it's reasonable to assume 90 percent of the growth is in the cities."

While many appreciate the plan and hope to implement some of the suggestions, others are skeptical.

Concrete Town Councilman Jason Miller balked at a line calling for "voluntary initiatives" to support longrange conservation.

"I hope that can be the case," he said. "I don't like regulation, but more and more I just feel like the general population has lost some of the guiding knowledge our forefathers had as far as how to build towns."

He said ultimately builders and developers will do what they want unless there are strict dos and don'ts.

Ellen Bynum, speaking for the Friends of Skagit County, said the no net loss plan for agricultural land won't work as written. She said Skagit County's farmland is built on specific types of soil that can't be replicated in every part of the county.

"You can't recreate those soils," she said. "You couldn't create new farmland to replace it."

While the notion of merging the cities is still far off, many are already discussing what to name the city. Would Burlington become Mount Vernon, or vice versa?

"That may be the biggest obstacle of the whole thing," Ragan said. "I think one of the fears is people would lose

their identity.”

After thinking about it, Mount Vernon Councilman Mike Urban settled on “Skagit.”

“My personal submission would just be ‘Skagit.’ Not ‘Skagit City,’ because that’s been done,” Urban said. “Skagit, Washington.”

Aaron Burkhalter can be reached at 360-416-2141 or [aburkhalter@skagitpublishing.com](mailto:aburkhalter@skagitpublishing.com). Follow him on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/schools\\_svh](http://www.twitter.com/schools_svh).

---

## At a glance

**What:** envision Skagit 2060 citizen committee workshop

**When:** 4-8 p.m. Thursday

**Where:** Northwest Washington Pipe Trades Apprenticeship Building, 780 Chrysler Drive, Burlington

**Purpose:** to share draft recommendations with the public and receive public comment