

## **Final Questions for Speakers** (Housing Topic only)

The majority of local residents agree today that the cost of either ownership or rental housing, whether single family or multi-unit, in Whatcom County and its cities is substantially higher than what the majority of residents should reasonably have to pay for basic, acceptable quality housing. In addition to cost, there is a severe lack of choices for consumers among available homes, in terms of size, design/plan, cost, location etc. Its obvious these two conditions are directly related.

Our goal is that this discussion will provide the audience, including local officials, with a better understanding of the several reasons for these problems, and encourage all local governments and the private sector to work together on solutions. As a community, we must solve this problem, as soon as possible.

Also, our severe affordable housing issue is stifling the ability of existing businesses to grow, and new ones to start up. In a June 6 report, the County Council's Business and Commerce Advisory Committee stated that the lack of housing for employees is a "primary obstacle" to business growth and retention in Whatcom County. The report also said this issue should be considered a crisis by local governments, and that as such: "normal procedures...[for solving the problem]...do not apply". Copies are available on the Common Threads NW site: <https://www.commonthreadsnw.org/>

### **Questions:**

#### **1. Why do we have what many are calling a crisis in local housing affordability and choices?**

Some say there are several factors: lack of buildable land, density and design restrictions, complex permit processes, wetland and stream rules, and permit and impact fee costs.

Are any other issues significant?

Which are most important in your opinion, and why?

#### **2. What can local government, businesses, residents, and non-profits do to mitigate this issue?**

Summarize how you would improve on the reasons you believe are most important.

State which solutions are short term and long term, in the sense of how complex and time consuming the process to achieve them will be.

### **3. Specific Issues:**

**A.** Regarding lack of buildable land for housing in the lower and middle price ranges, should local government invest more in needed capital facilities (sewer and water trunk lines, arterial roads etc), or push this cost for off-site infrastructure onto the private sector?

**B.** Also, can the loss of usable land due to wetland and stream buffers be reduced by more detailed scientific analysis of site and local conditions, at the applicant's expense?

**C.** Some local governments are considering adopting *new* restrictions on energy choices for necessary household appliances. Is their actual impact on the cost of housing, purchase or rent, and operation being considered?

**D.** Can often drawn out and ambiguous permit review processes for larger residential projects (5 units or more) be avoided? These conditions add major costs and uncertainty to housing construction.

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