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Kittitas County requests 88 more days

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ELLENSBURG – Kittitas County will request that a state land-use board grant it 88 more days to finish planning to bring the county into compliance with the state Growth Management Act.

If granted by the Eastern Washington Growth Management Hearings Board, the 88 days would be added starting on Feb. 18, making the new deadline May 16 for the county to show that its comprehensive land-use plan is in line with GMA rules.

Feb. 18 is the initial deadline the state board set for the county to reach compliance.

Agreement on the extension request was reached last Thursday between the county and other parties involved in an adverse ruling handed down Aug. 20 by the Eastern Washington growth board.

County Commissioner Mark McClain on Friday said one of the main features of the extension is to give three citizen advisory committees more time to develop their proposals to change aspects of the county's land-use management policies, goals and zoning rules.

"The most important thing is that we get it right," McClain said.

The deadline extension also is needed to give citizens adequate time to review whatever proposals are put forth by the committees and county planning staff, he said. The review also would include public hearings before the commissioners.

The state board's Aug. 20 ruling was the result of three citizen advocacy groups and the state last year filing a challenge to the county plan. The appeal was filed by the Kittitas County Conservation Coalition, Ridge from Upper County and Futurewise.

In addition, the state Department of Community, Trade & Economic Development, or CTED, also sought to overturn sections of the county plan.

Tim Trohimovich, planning director for Futurewise, on Friday said Futurewise initially suggested the time extension and was later supported in the effort by other parties to the case, including CTED.

Trohimovich said the county agreed to conditions in return for Futurewise's support of the county's request for more time.

The conditions by Futurewise include: provide completed materials to the public on all proposals at least three weeks before public hearings, continue work to complete updating land-use and zoning maps, designate which existing urban growth nodes should be changed into "limited areas of more intense rural development," or LAMIRDs, in accordance with GMA provisions, and complete work on new criteria for designating and de-designating property as commercial agriculture and forest lands.

Trohimovich said it is likely the Eastern Washington growth board will approve the extension in light of the support from all parties. Other parties in the case that had supported the county were the Central Washington Home Builders Association, M.F. Williams Construction Inc., Mitch Williams, Basil and Art Sinclair and Teanaway Ridge LLC.

A continued public hearing on preliminary proposals to change the county plan is set for 6 p.m. Feb. 13 at the fairgrounds. McClain said the hearing will be opened and then immediately continued to a later date.