

First-Round Population Forecast and Allocation

PLANNING TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (PTAC)

Report and Recommendation to the Steering Committee of Elected Officials

Periodic Update under the Growth Management Act, 2026 to 2046

Written and Recommended by PTAC, February 2024

Introduction

Following several months of discussion and analysis, the Planning Technical Advisory Committee (PTAC) recommends the following first-round allocation of population in Spokane County through the year 2046. This proposal, if recommended by the SCEO and adopted by the Board of County Commissioners, would constitute an initial allocation of future population that each jurisdiction would use to begin comprehensive planning pursuant to the requirements of the Growth Management Act (GMA).

The full recommendation is summarized on the last page of this report (page 6).

Base Assumptions—Countywide Population Forecast

All the following analysis and recommendations utilize the medium forecast for 2046 provided by the Washington Office of Financial Management (OFM) in 2022. PTAC assumes that this will be the selected countywide growth forecast, but as of the writing of this report the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) has not adopted that number as the official forecast. If, perchance, BOCC adopts a different forecast for the County, the recommendation provided in this memo will have to be adjusted accordingly.

Multiple Methods Considered

GMA requires that Counties and the jurisdictions undertake a regional effort to apportion the overall countywide population growth to each of the jurisdictions. While considering how best to do this, PTAC formed a subcommittee of volunteers from among its membership. The subcommittee analyzed and considered several methods that could be used to determine how each jurisdiction might grow. These included:

- A trend created from OFM total population estimates.
- A trend created from annual growth rates (OFM-reported).
- Outputs from the Spokane Regional Transportation Council (SRTC) Land Use Allocation Tool.
- A trend created from American Community Survey/Census reported populations.

After careful consideration of the results, statistical reliability, and relative accuracy of the trends created, PTAC recommends the use of historic OFM population estimates to generate population trends for each jurisdiction.

To generate a trend for each jurisdiction, OFM-reported total population for each jurisdiction from 2010 until 2023 were used to calculate a unique linear trend for each jurisdiction. Those trends were used to forecast total population out to 2046, indicating what proportion, or “share,” of the growth should be allocated to each jurisdiction.

Identified Shortfalls and Opportunities in OFM Trend Data

The resulting trend is entirely informed by actual past growth experienced by each jurisdiction rather than conjecture or projections based on less specific data. This approach has the added value of utilizing a data source strongly supported and recommended by the State Department of Commerce and one used by many other counties and cities throughout the state. While past growth is the most stable, statistically supported method for projecting data into the future, it comes with a few shortfalls:

- Recent events like the COVID pandemic and efforts by many jurisdictions in the past few years to foster greater residential development will not be reflected in the trend. Nor will changes to the development environment anticipated by House Bill 1110 and other similar GMA amendments passed in recent years.
- OFM-reported populations are primarily informed by development permits issued by each jurisdiction. Accordingly, consideration of remaining land supply and infrastructure capacity are not factored into the trend, only actual historic development.
- High growth in larger communities in Spokane coupled with slower growth in a few smaller communities resulted in negative projections for three jurisdictions: Fairfield, Latah, and Spangle. The consensus of the PTAC subcommittee is that this is an artifact of the trend calculations—PTAC does not actually expect those communities to shrink between now and 2046. See later in this memo for how this negative result was adjusted by PTAC.

A Two-Step Process for Allocation—Both Past and Present Factors

It is generally agreed that the allocation of population in Spokane County should be informed not only by mathematical trends but also by real-world conditions and the policy framework of each community. To that end, PTAC recommends a two-step process:

FIRST ROUND: Initial population allocation based on historic population trends.

SECOND ROUND: Adjusted final population allocation informed by each jurisdictions’ Land Capacity Analysis and other sources.

While the exact process for the second-round allocation is still under discussion by the PTAC, factors that are expected to inform the second-round allocation include:

- Past Growth Patterns
- Infrastructure Considerations (Capital Facility Plans, water studies, sewer studies)
- New Requirements of the Growth Management Act (HB 1220, etc.)
- Jurisdictional Feedback
- Proximity to Employment

Accordingly, the initial first-round allocation provided in this report is only a first step in an iterative process. These growth allocations are expected to change through a collaborative cross-jurisdictional discussion once each community has completed their capacity analyses and other studies.

Ensuring a Medium OFM Projection Countywide

When the results of this method were added together, the countywide population in 2046 exceeded the medium OFM population for the entire county. Accordingly, the results of the various linear trends were “normalized” to ensure that the sum of all populations in 2046 matched the medium OFM population trend. Essentially, the trends for all jurisdictions were adjusted very slightly downward to ensure that the sum of all populations conformed to the OFM Medium population.

The only jurisdiction that did not receive this normalization was Medical Lake, where normalization would result in a zero-growth projection. For Medical Lake, the raw trend was used without normalization, resulting in a very small rate of growth (see the following tables).

Negative Trends

For the purposes of the first round, PTAC recommends that the three communities showing negative trends (Fairfield, Latah, and Spangle) be manually adjusted to assume zero change, at least for the first round. PTAC feels that it is unlikely these communities will shrink over time, given the current OFM projections for countywide growth. However, lacking better information as to what growth they might expect, manual adjustment is helpful in that it allows time for these three communities to consider their growth potential from other sources before the final second-round allocation is completed. Once those analyses are complete, these numbers will likely rise during the second-round allocation.

First-Round Population Allocation

The table below (**Table 1**) presents the results of the trend for each jurisdiction, including the corrections and normalization discussed above. The 2023 OFM estimated population for each jurisdiction is shown as well for general information. As discussed above, these numbers are expected to change somewhat in the second round, as more is learned about each jurisdiction's ability/willingness to grow to this degree and their infrastructure/land capacity. However, this result provides a useful first step in regional and local growth planning.

Jurisdiction	2023 Baseline		2046 Allocation -- RECOMMENDATION			
	TOTAL		TOTAL		GROWTH	
	Total Population	% of Total	Total Population	% of Total	New Population by 2046	% of All County Growth
Spokane County (Whole)	554,600	100.00%	654,665	100.00%	100,065	100.00%
Unincorporated County (inclusive)	163,390	29.46%	198,626	30.34%	35,236	35.21%
Unincorporated Outside UGA Only	93,934	16.94%	98,642	15.07%	4,708	4.70%
Unincorporated Inside UGA Only	69,456	12.52%	99,984	15.27%	30,528	30.51%
Incorporated Spokane County (sum)	391,210	70.54%	456,039	69.66%	64,829	64.79%
Airway Heights	11,280	2.03%	17,945	2.74%	6,665	6.66%
Cheney	13,160	2.37%	16,535	2.53%	3,375	3.37%
Deer Park	4,925	0.89%	6,290	0.96%	1,365	1.36%
Fairfield	600	0.11%	600	0.09%	0	0.00%
Latah	185	0.03%	185	0.03%	0	0.00%
Liberty Lake	13,150	2.37%	21,934	3.35%	8,784	8.78%
Medical Lake	4,915	0.89%	5,159	0.79%	244	0.24%
Millwood	1,925	0.35%	1,974	0.30%	49	0.05%
Rockford	570	0.10%	636	0.10%	66	0.07%
Spangle	280	0.05%	280	0.04%	0	0.00%
Spokane	232,700	41.96%	256,057	39.11%	23,357	23.34%
Spokane Valley	107,400	19.37%	128,313	19.60%	20,913	20.90%
Waverly	120	0.02%	131	0.02%	11	0.01%
Source	OFM	CALC	CALC	TREND	CALC	CALC

Notes: UGA = Urban Growth Area, OFM = Office of Financial Management population estimate, CALC = Calculated Value, "inclusive" = includes both inside and outside the UGA

Comparison of Previous and New Allocations

The last time the County and Cities were asked to adopt a population allocation was during the 2017 Comprehensive Plan Update process. Since that time, growth in the County has generally outstripped the projections provided by OFM. Accordingly, the new countywide OFM projection provided by OFM assumes somewhat higher overall growth in Spokane County than before, in line with the actual growth seen between 2017 and 2023. In other words, OFM has corrected for the error in the previous forecast.

Because the growth expected in the future is significantly greater than last round, it is more useful to compare the share of overall growth allocated to each jurisdiction rather than the numerical growth in people. As shown in **Table 2** below, the overall share of growth that each jurisdiction is expected to accommodate has not changed significantly since the 2017 updates, save for the unincorporated UGA and the unincorporated rural areas outside the UGA.

Table 2: COMPARING 2017 AND 2026 SHARE OF GROWTH

Jurisdiction	2017 UPDATE CYCLE			2026 UPDATE CYCLE			COMPARISON	
	CURRENT	FUTURE		CURRENT	FUTURE		Share is Higher or Lower?	Change in Share %
	2017 Population	Growth through 2037	Share of County Growth	2023 Population	Growth through 2046	Share of County Growth		
Spokane County (Whole)	499,348	84,061	100.00%	554,600	100,065	100.00%	-	-
Unincorporated County (inclusive)	144,903	31,877	37.92%	163,390	35,236	35.21%	Lower	-2.71%
Unincorporated Outside UGA Only	91,010	17,653	21.00%	93,934	4,708	4.70%	Lower	-16.30%
Unincorporated Inside UGA Only	53,893	14,224	16.92%	69,456	30,528	30.51%	Higher	13.59%
Incorporated Spokane County (sum)	354,445	52,184	62.08%	391,210	64,829	64.79%	Higher	2.71%
Airway Heights	9,071	5,226	6.22%	11,280	6,665	6.66%	Higher	0.44%
Cheney	11,827	2,949	3.51%	13,160	3,375	3.37%	Lower	-0.14%
Deer Park	4,110	1,215	1.45%	4,925	1,365	1.36%	Lower	-0.08%
Fairfield	620	40	0.05%	600	0	0.00%	Same	-0.05%
Latah	195	0	0.00%	185	0	0.00%	Same	0.00%
Liberty Lake	9,780	6,129	7.29%	13,150	8,784	8.78%	Higher	1.49%
Medical Lake	5,072	970	1.15%	4,915	244	0.24%	Lower	-0.91%
Millwood	1,808	139	0.17%	1,925	49	0.05%	Lower	-0.12%
Rockford	470	0	0.00%	570	66	0.07%	Higher	0.07%
Spangle	281	7	0.01%	280	0	0.00%	Lower	-0.01%
Spokane	215,839	20,859	24.81%	232,700	23,357	23.34%	Lower	-1.47%
Spokane Valley	95,264	14,650	17.43%	107,400	20,913	20.90%	Higher	3.47%
Waverly	108	0	0.00%	120	11	0.01%	Higher	0.01%
Source	SCEO	SCEO	CALC	OFM	PTAC	CALC	CALC	CALC

Notes: UGA = Urban Growth Area, CALC = Calculated Value, PTAC = Round One Population Allocation Recommendation (see Table 1 above), "inclusive" = includes both inside and outside the UGA, SCEO = Steering Committee of Elected Officials Report, Population Forecast and Allocation, November 2015.

As **Table 2** shows, most jurisdictions can expect very similar shares of future growth compared the previous comprehensive plan update process. Most shares would change less than two percent, except for Spokane Valley which indicates slightly more than a four percent increase in share.

Of note, the share of growth expected in the Unincorporated UGA and Unincorporated Outside the UGA areas differs more than 13 percent when comparing the 2017 and 2024 cycles. The assumption during the 2017 update cycle was that more growth would occur in the rural areas outside the UGA than in the unincorporated UGA. However, growth reported by OFM since 2020 has been significantly higher in the unincorporated UGA areas than in the rural areas. By using historic population to create trends for these areas, the recommended allocation for this round corrects that inconsistency and allocates much more growth to the unincorporated UGA than to the rural areas. The trend utilized by PTAC to form this first-round recommendation made this adjustment naturally without the need for any manual adjustment of the projection—development since 2017 was truly higher inside the UGA than outside it, creating a higher projected growth trend.

Conclusion & Recommendation

In consideration of the data and analysis described above, the PTAC recommends to the SCEO the following:

1. Approve a First Round Population Allocation for Spokane County and its jurisdictions based on the following share of future growth through 2046:

Table 3: PTAC Recommendation, 2046 Forecast and Allocation			
Jurisdiction	% of Future Growth	Additional Population in 2046	Total Population in 2046
Spokane County (Whole) ¹	100.00%	100,065	654,665
Unincorporated County (inclusive)	35.21%	35,236	198,626
Unincorporated Outside UGA Only	4.70%	4,708	98,642
Unincorporated Inside UGA Only	30.51%	30,528	99,984
Incorporated Spokane County (sum)	64.79%	64,829	456,039
Airway Heights	6.66%	6,665	17,945
Cheney	3.37%	3,375	16,535
Deer Park	1.36%	1,365	6,290
Fairfield ²	0.00%	0	600
Latah ²	0.00%	0	185
Liberty Lake	8.78%	8,784	21,934
Medical Lake	0.24%	244	5,159
Millwood	0.05%	49	1,974
Rockford	0.07%	66	636
Spangle ²	0.00%	0	280
Spokane	23.34%	23,357	256,057
Spokane Valley	20.90%	20,913	128,313
Waverly	0.01%	11	131
<i>Notes:</i>	¹ The Spokane County number represents the medium OFM projection for Spokane County, expected to be adopted by the BOCC in a meeting in the first quarter of 2024. It is not a part of this recommendation. ² It is not expected that the growth for these three jurisdictions will remain at zero through the final allocation.		

2. Ask each Jurisdiction to provide input to the PTAC on their capacity and ability to serve this amount of growth as well as any known or reasonably expected development that might change the population they can expect to accommodate within 20 years, after which PTAC will provide any recommended changes to the table above to achieve a final recommended allocation.