

Date: September 13, 2023
To: Steering Committee of Elected Officials
From: Planning Technical Advisory Committee
Subject: Office of Financial Management – Population Projections

Development of population projections for the Growth Management Act (GMA) is a shared responsibility. As directed by statute, the Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM) prepares a range of population growth for Washington counties taking part in GMA. County officials are responsible for selecting a 20-year GMA planning target from within the range of high and low prepared by OFM. Under an interlocal agreement, the Steering Committee of Elected Officials (SCEO) is tasked with providing a recommendation on the population planning target to the Board of County Commissioners (BoCC). Once a GMA population target for the county is selected, the county along with its cities are then tasked with developing population planning targets for each city, town, and unincorporated areas.

OFM provides population projections at the countywide level to all counties planning under the Growth Management Act every five years. The latest OFM projection is from 2022, meaning that the next population projection will not be available until 2027, one year after periodic updates are due. Table 1 below provides OFM's low, medium, and high projections for Spokane County (for reference, the 2022 County population was 542,100).

Table 1: 2046 OFM Population Projection for Spokane County

	Low	Medium	High
2046 Population Projection	575,281	654,665	770,248

The PTAC has reviewed the projections from OFM and recommends that the SCEO recommend to the BoCC adoption of OFM's medium population projection for the 20-year GMA planning period ending in 2046. The PTAC makes this recommendation based on four main factors.

1. In 2017 the county adopted OFM's medium projection. While the region saw growth above the medium projection since 2017, OFM now has the advantage of being nearer to the Decennial Census for 2020 which provides more recent data to aid in their forecast. As part of the Census, and in consideration of the growth experienced since the last forecast was made, OFM made substantial adjustments to its population projections for our region. The adjustment moves the old medium to account for the region's more robust population growth, then uses this new number as part of the calculus for projected growth (see Figure 1).
2. Recent changes to the GMA require Spokane County and cities with a population over 6,000 to provide the Washington State Department of Commerce with an implementation progress report detailing the progress achieved in implementing their comprehensive plan, including housing targets. These progress reports are due five years after the periodic update. This means the county and the larger cities will be able to track population trends and respond to those changes more frequently than in previous years.
3. The financing and planning for capital facilities is not only critical to orderly development and urban growth area planning, but is required by the GMA. If communities adopt too low of a population projection, growth can exceed the planned capacity of facilities and services. On the other hand, adopting too high of a population projection may lead to planning and financing capital facilities that are not needed, or if facilities and financing is unavailable a requirement to adjust land use elements and/or urban growth areas to ensure funding matches projected needs.

- In 2021, the Washington Legislature changed the way communities plan for housing. House Bill 1220 amended the GMA to instruct local governments to “plan for and accommodate” housing affordable to all income levels. This means comprehensive plans and zoning regulations must accommodate housing for all income segments including moderate, low, very low and extremely low incomes, as well as emergency housing and permanent supportive housing. Like capital facilities, planning for too low or a too high population can place burdens at the local level in meeting this new requirement to “plan for and accommodate” all income segments.

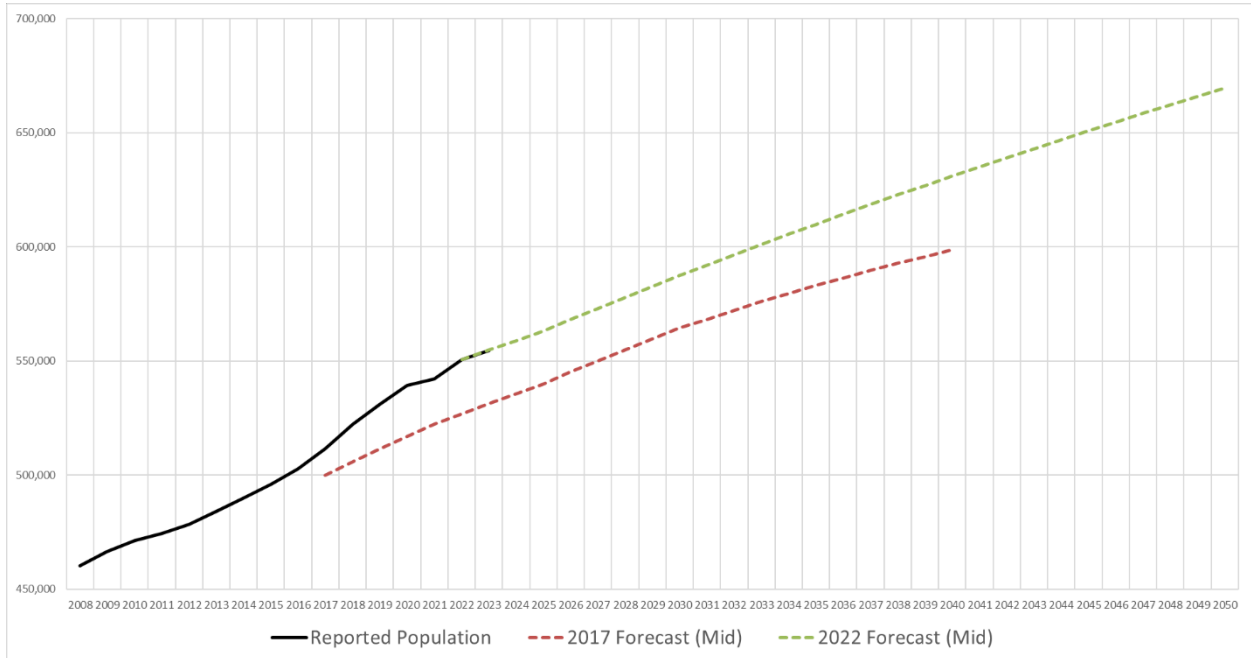


Figure 1: Comparison between OFM’s 2017 and 2022 Medium Population Projection for Spokane County