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Published March 10, 2011

JBLM acquires 13 partners

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More than a dozen local agencies are forming a regional alliance to better manage the area's military-related growth.

The creation of the South Sound Military and Communities Partnership is the first of 46 recommendations contained in the Joint Base Lewis-McChord Growth Coordination Plan.

The plan, released in December, calls for closer collaboration between the West Coast's largest military installation and surrounding communities. It recommends several ways to address stresses on housing, roads, schools and social services around Lewis-McChord.

Lakewood City Manager Andrew Neiditz said forming the partnership is a signal that the growth plan won't be left on a shelf to gather dust.

"If we can work off this plan, then this region can speak with one voice, which has not been the case," he said.

Lakewood managed the federal grant that paid for the growth plan.

The partnership will work to carry out the plan's recommendations, join with state and federal officials to secure funding, and serve as the point of contact on troop deployments and other Lewis-McChord activities that affect surrounding communities.

The 14 partners include Lewis-McChord, Thurston and Pierce counties, local cities, the Clover Park School District and the United Way of Pierce County.

Virtually all the agencies had a seat on the steering committee that guided the plan's development. The agencies are in the process of signing the agreement, which takes effect May 1.

Each agency is expected this year to contribute up to \$2,500, or more if it wishes, to get the partnership started. The plan estimates expenses of between \$130,000 and \$170,000 a year, which includes administration and costs to hire consultants and commission studies.

The partnership's first task will be to establish a five-year work plan to implement the growth plan's recommendations. Recommendations include expanding access to medical care, child care and after-school programs for military families; helping local businesses secure military contracts; and improving the Lewis-McChord stretch of Interstate 5 to relieve congestion.

DuPont City Administrator Dawn Masko, whose community has many military families and retirees, said the collaboration has value because individual cities like hers can't address the complex issues alone.

"I think there's strength in numbers," she said.

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