



WASHINGTON ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®

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Growth Management Act

Background:

The Growth Management Act mandates local comprehensive planning. It requires each county to adopt Countywide Planning Policies to guide and govern the local comprehensive planning process.

Planning Goals: The Growth Management Act establishes a framework and provides tools to help communities manage their growth in a comprehensive and coordinated manner by setting out fourteen goals to be adopted in the "Countywide Planning Policies" (CPPs) to guide local governments in planning to accommodate growth. Among the goals are sprawl reduction, concentrated urban growth, economic development, environmental protection, adequate infrastructure, affordable housing, and transportation. Implementation occurs primarily at the local level through a framework that includes: countywide planning policies, comprehensive plans, development regulations, capital budgets and other funding programs. Specific planning goals include: *Economic Development*: "To provide a strong and diverse economy providing job opportunities, and expand economic opportunities;" and, *Housing*: "Encourage the availability of affordable housing to all economic segments of the population, promote a variety of residential densities and housing types, and encourage preservation of existing housing stock."

County-Wide Planning Policies: Each county must adopt a county-wide planning policy in cooperation with the cities in the county. A county-wide planning policy creates a framework from which consistent county and city comprehensive plans are adopted. A county-wide planning policy must address policies: implementing urban growth areas; promoting contiguous and orderly development with urban services; siting public capital facilities; providing transportation facilities and strategies; considering the need for affordable housing; providing regional planning; and, encouraging economic development.

Urban Growth Areas: Counties that plan under the Growth Management Act must designate urban growth areas sufficient to accommodate the projected population and economic growth expected to occur over the next 20 years. Jurisdictions must protect sensitive and critical areas, while providing urban densities (four units per acre) within the urban growth area. Public lands, open space, recreational lands, critical areas, and land restricted by other development conditions should be excluded from the computations of buildable land to accommodate for population projections, employment, and housing. There must be recognition that not all land is available for development at one time. Use of land should be inventoried annually and urban growth boundaries should be adjusted as necessary to sufficiently accommodate growth projections. Land supply and densities inside UGAs must be sufficient to ensure a competitive development market and promote affordable housing for all economic segments of the population.

Comprehensive Plans: To establish a land-use planning process as a basis for decisions on actions related to use of land and to assure an adequate factual base for decisions, every county and city must adopt a comprehensive plan that includes a variety of elements. The planning goals must guide the development and adoption of comprehensive plans. Each comprehensive plan must include a land use element, housing element, capital facilities plan element, utilities element, and transportation element, along with designations of critical areas and natural resource lands. In addition, the comprehensive plan of a county must include a rural element and final designations of urban growth areas. Counties and cities are encouraged to use innovative land use management techniques, including density bonuses, cluster housing and the transfer of development rights. The plan must be internally consistent.

The land use element must designate "the proposed general distribution and general location and extent of the uses of land, where appropriate, for agriculture, timber production, housing, commerce, industry, recreation, open spaces, general aviation airports, public utilities, public facilities, and other land uses. The land use element shall include population densities, building intensities, and estimates of future population growth."

The housing element must ensure "the vitality and character of established residential neighborhoods that: (a) Includes an inventory and analysis of existing and projected housing needs; (b) includes a statement of goals, policies, objectives, and mandatory provisions for the preservation, improvement, and development of housing, including single-family residences; (c) identifies sufficient land for housing; and (d) makes adequate provisions for existing and projected needs of all economic segments of the community."

Development Regulations: Each county and city must adopt development regulations that are consistent with and implement its comprehensive plan. Development regulations are the controls placed on development or land use activities by a county or city, including: zoning ordinances, critical areas ordinances, shoreline master programs, official controls (regulating building permits, height, size, set-backs, etc.), planned unit development ordinances, platting and subdivision ordinances, and binding site plan ordinances. Development regulations must provide timely and predictable procedures. Each local government must establish a permit review process that provides for the integrated and consolidated review and decision for project permits. Each local government is encouraged to adopt further project review provisions to provide prompt, coordinated review and ensure accountability, including expedited review for project permit applications for projects that are consistent with adopted development regulations and within the capacity of system-wide infrastructure improvements.

Review and Evaluation: Under the GMA, comprehensive plans and development regulations are subject to continuing review and evaluation by each jurisdiction, every five years, to monitor land supply and urban densities to ensure a sufficient land supply (with applicable development regulations) is available for development to accommodate residential and non-residential growth. The program must provide for the annual collection of data on land uses, development, critical areas, and capital facilities, to determine the quantity and type of buildable land needed for residential and employment-based activities. At least every 10 years, all counties planning under the GMA must review their urban growth areas, and the county and each city must review the densities allowed and revise regulations necessary to accommodate the projected growth for the succeeding 20-year period. If the evaluation shows an inconsistency between planned growth and actual development, the county and its cities must adopt corrective measures.

Analysis:

Growth management is intended to serve as the integrating framework for all other land-use related laws. The act should provide the means to effectively combine certainty for development decisions, reasonable environmental protection, long-range planning for cost-effective infrastructure, and orderly growth and development. Comprehensive planning should provide the fundamental building blocks to effectively accommodate residential and commercial growth, and provide coordinated land-use development regulations and procedures.

Each jurisdiction determines the availability and use of land to develop, and in doing so, controls the housing supply relative to demand, which in turn, affects the housing prices. Several government policies have led to increased restrictions on the region's housing supply and economic development potential. Whether created to encourage public involvement, quality of life, environmental protection/preservation, transit orientation or other well-intentioned efforts, these policies clearly have had major impacts on housing costs, along with significant economic consequences.

While the GMA is designed to accommodate projected population growth over the next twenty years by concentrating higher density development in urban areas, many local governments often reduce the density of new residential projects due to community opposition to high-density developments. Consequently, many local governments are not meeting the density and population targets established under GMA.

In order for the Growth Management Act to work, local governments must increase the potential for development in urban areas to offset limited development in rural areas. Unless that happens, the supply of housing will fall short of demand, leading to higher prices and putting affordable housing beyond the reach of many families.

Unfortunately, for too many Washington families, home-ownership remains a dream. Housing prices are skyrocketing in areas of high demand, causing people to purchase housing in communities far from where they work. This results in increased traffic congestion, higher property taxes, jurisdictions struggling to provide infrastructure, and employers having difficulty filling job-openings.

Many communities lack the supply of housing needed to meet the high demand, and many jurisdictions are not sufficiently accommodating growth, as required by the Growth Management Act. Without the potential for enforcement, many jurisdictions are failing to plan for, and therefore, are not enabling the development of sufficient residential units to accommodate demand. Further, additional resources for transportation and infrastructure are needed to accommodate projected growth, and incentive measures are needed for developers to encourage infill development and redevelopment, and reduce other barriers for developing in urban areas.

While the Central Puget Sound area faces substantial growth pressures, the rest of the state faces much different challenges. These areas struggle with severe shortages of trained workforce and a lack of land with applicable development regulations available for development for new business sites – and most importantly, a lack of demand for economic development. To encourage economic development throughout the state, targeted infrastructure investments and tax incentives must be made to provide the transportation and telecommunications infrastructure, water and public utilities necessary to attract business, while ensuring a sufficient amount of buildable land, with applicable development regulations, is available for development.

Conclusion:

REALTORS® are committed to pursuing reasonable and market-driven growth strategies that will meet the state's housing needs, expand home-ownership opportunities, help revitalize the state's cities and inner suburbs, build attractive and livable neighborhoods and communities, and allow for continued economic prosperity.

REALTORS® support planning for growth that allows for a wide range of housing types to suit the needs and income levels of a community's diverse population, while recognizing "smart" ways to manage growth by permitting higher densities. REALTORS® support measures that meet the underlying demand for housing by employing market-driven and innovative land use planning techniques that use the land more efficiently.

REALTORS® urge the following principles be used as we continue to change the Growth Management Act and adopt Smart Growth strategies:

- Anticipate and plan for economic development and population growth in a timely, orderly and predictable manner.
- Ensure comprehensive plans provide sufficient measures to accommodate growth by making available an ample supply of buildable land for residential, commercial, industrial and recreational uses to meet demand, while protecting open space and environmentally sensitive areas.
- Ensure comprehensive plans provide a housing element with an inventory and analysis of existing and projected housing needs; housing targets to achieve needs; a statement of goals, policies, objectives, and provisions for the preservation, improvement, and development of housing; identifies sufficient land for housing to accommodate growth, as prescribed in the state's Growth Management Act; and provides performance measures to gauge how each jurisdiction is achieving its goals and accommodating planned growth.
- Remove regulatory barriers to allow innovative land use planning techniques to be used in building higher density and mixed-use developments, as well as infill developments in our urban cities.
- Ensure the process for reviewing site-specific land development applications is reasonable, timely, predictable and fair.
- Plan and construct new infrastructure in a timely manner to keep pace with the current and future demand for housing, and find fair and broad-based ways to pay the costs of infrastructure investment that benefits the entire community.
- Achieve a reasonable balance in the land use planning process by using innovative planning concepts to protect the environment, improve traffic flow, relieve over-crowded schools, accommodate projected growth, encourage economic development, and enhance the quality of life.