

THE WASHINGTON STATE GROWTH MANAGEMENT ACT WITH APPLICATIONS FOR THE CENTRAL PUGET SOUND REGION*

The Washington Legislature enacted the Growth Management Act (GMA) in 1990 to guide planning for growth and development in the state. The Act requires local governments in fast growing and densely populated counties to develop and adopt comprehensive plans. The Act has been regularly amended to further define requirements and to advance coordination among local governments. This overview highlights key features of the Act.

A. MULTICOUNTY PLANNING POLICIES (*Chapter 36.70A.210(7), Revised Code of Washington – RCW*)

Multicounty planning policies serve as a common framework for local, countywide, and regional planning in the King, Kitsap, Pierce, and Snohomish counties. Local governments in the four-county region have agreed to use the Puget Sound Regional Council to develop these policies. The multicounty policies are grouped into six topic areas:

- *Environment*
- *Housing*
- *Transportation*
- *Development Patterns*
(including *Urban Growth Areas and Orderly Development & Design*)
- *Economic Development*
- *Public Services*
(including *Siting Facilities*)

B. COUNTYWIDE PLANNING POLICIES (*RCW 36.70A.210 and .215*)

Counties are to work with their cities to prepare countywide planning policies. These policies provide a further guidance for coordinating local planning efforts within the counties. In addition to the topics listed under multicounty planning policies, countywide planning efforts also include an analysis of fiscal impacts and include a review and evaluation program. As part of this process, counties work with municipalities to evaluate future land needs, including regular review of development trends and assumptions.

C. COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING (*RCW 36.70A.070*)

Local comprehensive plans are to be reviewed and updated every seven years. Plans must be internally consistent, that is, elements within the plan must be mutually reinforcing. Consistency is also required among the plans of adjacent jurisdictions and where common regional issues exist. In addition, development regulations, such as zoning, must be consistent with local plans.

1. Required Plan Elements (*RCW 36.70A.070*)

Local comprehensive plans are to include, at a minimum, the following elements:

- *Land Use*
- *Utilities*
- *Economic Development*
- *Housing*
- *Transportation*
- *Parks and Recreation*
- *Capital Facilities*
- *Rural (for counties only)*

In addition, the Act allows for the following optional elements:

- *Conservation*
- *Solar Energy*

2. Urban Growth Areas (*RCW 36.70A.110*)

Urban growth areas are designated by counties, in consultation with municipalities. These areas are to accommodate 20 years of growth, based on projections provided by the Washington Office of Financial Management (OFM). No annexations are allowed beyond designated urban growth areas.

3. Resource Lands and Critical Areas (*RCW 36.70A.050, .060, .170, and .172*)

The Act requires designations and regulations for resource lands and critical areas, such as farmlands, wetlands, and hazard areas. Jurisdictions must identify natural resources of statewide significance, such as forests and mineral areas.

4. Siting of Essential Public Facilities (*RCW 36.70A.150*)

Each jurisdiction must identify lands useful for public purposes and essential public facilities, such as airports, educational facilities, and utility corridors. State, regional, county, and local agencies are to coordinate in determining the need for and the location of public facilities.

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* prepared by the Growth Management Department, Puget Sound Regional Council, revised August 2009

5. Concurrency (RCW 36.70A.070(6)(b) and .108)

The Act requires that facilities such as transportation and utilities are to be in place at the time development is completed - or that a commitment has been made to complete the facilities within six years. For transportation facilities, both the assessment of need and the service improvements emphasize transportation modes that provide alternatives to driving alone.

D. STATE COMPLIANCE WITH LOCAL PLANS AND REGIONAL POLICIES (RCW 36.70A.103, .210(4))

There is no statewide comprehensive plan required in Washington state. However, many state agencies develop plans for particular services or facilities, such as the Washington Transportation Plan. State agencies' plans and projects are required to comply with local plans, as well as countywide and multicounty planning policies.

E. REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLANNING (RCW 47.80.010 - .050)

Regional transportation planning organizations (RTPOs) are required to develop a *regional transportation plan*. The RTPO for King, Kitsap, Pierce and Snohomish counties is the Puget Sound Regional Council. (This legislation parallels federal requirements for metropolitan transportation planning by metropolitan planning organizations – or MPOs. The Regional Council is also the four-county region's MPO.) The RTPO is also to develop a six-year transportation improvement program, which identifies funding for transportation projects and programs.

1. Regional Guidelines and Principles (RCW 47.80.026)

To ensure consistency between regional and local plans, RTPOs are to establish a common set of *regional guidelines and principles*. In the central Puget Sound region, the *multicounty planning policies* serve as these guidelines and principles.

2. Certification of Local Comprehensive Plans (RCW 47.80.023(3))

RTPOs are to certify the transportation-related provisions in local comprehensive plans. Certification is to address consistency with (1) regional guidelines and principles, which in the central Puget Sound region are the multicounty planning policies, (2) the adopted regional transportation plan, and (3) the requirements for comprehensive planning in the Growth Management Act.

3. Certification of Countywide Planning Policies (RCW 47.80.023(4))

The Regional Council also certifies countywide planning policies based on the multicounty planning policies, which serve as the policy framework for the regional transportation plan.

F. LOCAL SIX-YEAR COMPREHENSIVE TRANSPORTATION PROGRAMS (RCW 35.58.2795; 35.77.010; 36.81.121)

Each year local jurisdictions must prepare and adopt six-year comprehensive transportation programs, which are to also address transit, walking, and bicycling. These programs must be consistent with the local comprehensive plan and with the regional transportation plan.

G. TAXING AUTHORIZATION (RCW 82.02 and .46)

Excise Taxes – can be used for improvements specified in the capital facilities element of the local comprehensive plan. The rate is set at 0.25% on real property, with an option for an additional 0.25% based on a vote of the people.

Impact Fees – can be levied and must demonstrate that they “reasonably” benefit new development. These fees may be used for (1) streets and roads, (2) open space, parks and recreation, (3) school facilities, and/or (4) fire protection.

H. GROWTH MANAGEMENT HEARINGS BOARDS (RCW 36.70A.250 - .320)

Under the Act, hearings boards have been created for three regions of the state, including the four-county central Puget Sound region. These three-member boards hear cases regarding the consistency or compliance of a local plan with requirements of the Act. Board findings are transmitted to the Governor and may include recommendations for sanctions to be applied.

I. SANCTIONS FOR NONCOMPLIANCE (RCW 36.70A.340, 82.08.180, 82.14.215)

Jurisdictions found in noncompliance with the Growth Management Act stand the risk of losing some or all of the following sources of revenues, grants, and loans:

- *State public works loans and/or water pollution facility grants*
- *Transportation improvement program and arterial accounts*
- *Liquor profit and excise taxes*
- *Motor vehicle fuel tax*
- *Sales and use taxes*
- *real estate excise tax*