



GMA & Quality of Life

Growth Management Services

Counties, cities completing GMA requirements to manage Washington's forecasted growth



Description

The Growth Management Act (GMA) was passed in 1990 because Washington was growing rapidly, and in many areas, the quality of life that has made the state such a desirable place to live was rapidly disappearing. The state has added 1 million people since the GMA was passed and expects to add about another 1.5 million by 2020. The intent of the GMA is to guide local governments in assessing their goals and developing comprehensive plans and regulations that provide for growth without sacrificing the livability of communities in the future.

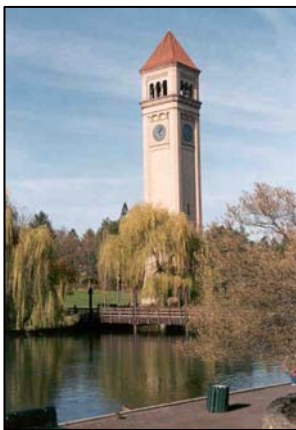
The GMA calls for the fastest-growing counties, and the cities within them, to plan extensively for land and water use. Twenty-nine counties and 218 cities – representing 95 percent of the state's population – have a full set of requirements under the GMA, including preparing comprehensive plans and development regulations. Ten counties are planning for natural resource lands and critical areas only.

Background

Passed in 1990 and amended in later years, the GMA requires the state's fastest growing counties, and the cities within them, to prepare comprehensive plans. The plans include the following chapters: land use, housing, capital facilities, transportation, utilities, shorelines, economic development, and rural (for counties). Chapters on economic development and parks and recreation also are required, if state funding is provided. The land use chapter sets out the amount, location, and densities for land uses, such as residences, businesses, and industries. It also includes a future land use map that shows urban growth areas, where urban growth will occur during a 20-year period. Optional chapters on energy, the environment, or other topics may be included in comprehensive plans.

The GMA requires local governments to adopt development regulations, such as subdivision and zoning ordinances, to carry out comprehensive plans.

Especially vulnerable areas also need to be addressed under the GMA. All local governments must identify and protect critical areas, including wetlands and frequently flooded areas, and identify natural resource lands, such as farm and forest lands.





In 1995 land use regulatory reform required all local governments to establish integrated, consolidated land use permit systems. Local governments were also encouraged to combine environmental analysis with land use planning.

Other GMA changes are:

- A requirement that shoreline management plans be incorporated into comprehensive plans.
- Guidance to counties on how to protect rural areas and to reconcile existing development with the need to protect rural character.
- Establishment of a review and evaluation program for King, Pierce, Snohomish, Kitsap, Clark, and Thurston counties – known as the Buildable Lands Program – to make sure they have enough land for development.
- A requirement for the inclusion of level of service standards for state-owned transportation facilities in local comprehensive plans.

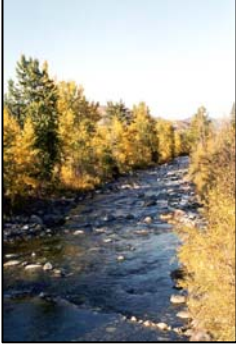
Under the GMA, three regional growth management hearings boards hear petitions on whether comprehensive plans and development regulations meet the requirements of the GMA.

What's Being Done

Nearly all local governments required to prepare comprehensive plans under the GMA have completed their first plans under the act. They are now carrying out plan goals and policies to manage growth for a 20-year planning period in their communities. The results of growth management are beginning to be seen in the state. Many communities are revitalizing their downtowns with attractive, compact development. Communities are planning for economic development to draw new businesses to their areas, while protecting the environment. Open space and recreation opportunities are being enhanced. Transportation policies are being examined and better ways are being sought to handle congestion and foster alternatives to the single-occupancy vehicle. Farms and forestlands have been designated. Historic buildings are being preserved. Local communities are deciding how to provide public services, such as water and sewers, for growing populations. Most importantly, citizens are participating in planning for the future of their communities.



Growth Management Services, a program of the Washington State Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED), provides technical and financial assistance to help jurisdictions successfully comply with the goals of the GMA. This help includes review of GMA documents – such as comprehensive plans, development regulations including critical areas ordinances, and amendments to these plans and regulations. Workshops, information materials, and one-on-one consultations are available.



For More Information

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CTED also works with other state agencies, government organizations, citizen and interest groups, business organizations, and the environmental community to carry out the GMA.

What's Next

Local governments fully planning under the GMA are required to review, evaluate, and, if needed, revise their comprehensive plans and development regulations to ensure they comply with the GMA. Local governments planning for resource lands and critical areas only are required to review, evaluate and, if needed, revise these ordinances. The deadline to complete this requirement varies from county to county. The earliest deadline for some counties and cities for completing this requirement was December 1, 2004.

Growth Management Services is offering technical assistance bulletins and workshops on the GMA Update.

Photos: Jan Meston; CTED/Rita R. Robison