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

The Washington State Legislature enacted the Growth Management Act (GMA) in 1990 in response to growth and development pressures in the state. The Act requires local governments in fast growing and densely populated areas to develop and adopt comprehensive plans. The Growth Management Act has been amended several times between 1991 and 2005 to further define requirements and to establish a framework for coordination among local governments. The following points highlight key requirements in the Act.

A. COUNTYWIDE PLANNING POLICIES *(Chapter 36.70A.210, 36.70A.215, Revised Code of Washington-RCW)*

Counties are to work with their cities to prepare countywide planning policies. These policies provide a common framework for local planning efforts within the counties. At a minimum, countywide planning policies must address:

- Designation of urban growth areas
- Contiguous & orderly development and providing urban services
- Siting major public capital facilities
- Transportation strategies & facilities
- Affordable housing needs & distribution
- Facilitation of joint planning
- Economic development and employment

In addition, countywide planning efforts are to include an analysis of fiscal impacts and must establish a review and evaluation program. As part of this program, counties are to work with municipalities to calculate the amount of "buildable land" located within their jurisdictions and to evaluate future land needs. If planning goals are not being achieved, then jurisdictions may have to adjust their land use strategies.

B. MULTICOUNTY PLANNING POLICIES *(RCW 36.70A.210(7))*

Multicounty planning policies are required for King, Pierce and Snohomish counties and their cities. Other less-populated counties may opt to participate in adopting multicounty policies. Local governments in the multicounty region have agreed to use the Puget Sound Regional Council to develop and adopt these planning policies.

C. COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

Comprehensive plans must be internally consistent, that is, elements within the plan must be mutually reinforcing. Consistency is also required between the plans of adjacent jurisdictions. In addition, development regulations must be consistent with local comprehensive plans.

1. REQUIRED PLAN ELEMENTS (RCW 36.70A.070; 36.70A.103)

Local comprehensive plans are to include the seven elements listed below. State agencies are required to comply with local comprehensive plans. Newly incorporated cities have four years from the date of incorporation to adopt plans.

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

2. URBAN GROWTH AREAS (RCW 36.70A.110)

Urban growth areas must be designated by counties, in consultation with municipalities. These areas are to accommodate 20 years of growth, based on projections provided by the Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM). Urban growth area designations are to be reviewed every 10 years. No annexations are allowed beyond designated growth areas.

3. RESOURCE LANDS AND CRITICAL AREAS (RCW 36.70A.050, 35.70A.060; 36.70A.170)

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

(continued on back)

** Prepared by the Growth Management Department, Puget Sound Regional Council, revised September 2005*

4. *SITING OF ESSENTIAL PUBLIC FACILITIES (RCW 36.70A.150; 36.70A.200)*
   Each jurisdiction must identify lands useful for public purposes and essential public facilities, such as airports, educational facilities, utility and transportation corridors, correctional facilities, solid waste handling facilities, in-patient facilities and recreational facilities. State, regional, county and local agencies are to coordinate in determining the need for and the location of public facilities.

D. REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLANNING *(RCW 47.80.010 - 47. 80.050)*

The Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) is authorized to develop a multicounty Regional Transportation Plan. The RTPO for King, Kitsap, Pierce, and Snohomish counties is the Puget Sound Regional Council. Regional transportation policy boards are to be created to provide advice. In addition, the Regional Council is to develop a six-year transportation improvement program.

The regional plan, local plans, and countywide planning policies are to be consistent. The Regional Council must work with local jurisdictions to establish regional transportation guidelines and principles. The Council is required to certify that the transportation-related provisions within local jurisdictions' comprehensive plans are consistent with the regional transportation plan and conform with Growth Management Act requirements. The Council is also required to certify that countywide planning policies and the regional transportation plan are consistent.

Transportation facilities and services of statewide significance are defined in the Act and declared to be "essential public facilities." The state Transportation Commission is required to identify highways of "statewide significance." The Washington State Department of Transportation is directed to work with local jurisdictions to establish level-of-service standards or performance measures for all state highways and ferry routes. These facilities, as well as impacts needs and level-of-service standards on state-owned facilities, are to be identified in local comprehensive plans.

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

Local governments and agencies must annually prepare and adopt six-year comprehensive transportation programs, which are also to include transit, bicycle and pedestrian needs. These programs must be consistent with the transportation element of the local comprehensive plan and with the regional transportation plan.

F. TAXING AUTHORIZATION *(RCW 82.46; 82.02)*

l. *EXCISE TAXES*
Excise taxes can only be used for capital improvements specified in the capital facilities element of a local government's comprehensive plan. The excise tax is set at a rate of 0.25% on real property, and there is an option for an additional 0.25% upon a vote of the people.

2. *IMPACT FEES*
   If impact fees are levied, they must "reasonably" benefit new development. These fees may only be used for: streets and roads, open space, parks and recreation, school facilities, and fire protection.

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

Hearings boards have been created for three regions of the state, including the four-county central Puget Sound region (King, Kitsap, Pierce, and Snohomish counties). The three-member boards are authorized to hear charges of inconsistency and noncompliance, as well as challenges to population projections developed by the state Office of Financial Management (OFM). The boards transmit their findings to the governor and may recommend that sanctions be authorized.

H. SANCTIONS FOR NONCOMPLIANCE *(RCW 36.70A.340; 82.08.180; 82.14.215)*

Jurisdictions found to be in noncompliance with the requirements of the Growth Management Act stand the risk of losing some or all of the following sources of revenue, grants, and/or loans:

- Eligibility for state public works project loans and/or water pollution control facility grants
- Motor vehicle fuel tax
- Transportation improvement and arterial accounts
- Sales and use taxes
- Liquor profit and excise taxes
- Power to collect real estate excise tax