



American Planning Association
Washington Chapter

Creating Great Communities for All

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February 10, 2025

The Honorable Jesse Salomon
Local Government Committee
Washington State Senate
Olympia, WA

Subject: SB 5660

Dear Chair Salomon,

I am writing on behalf of the American Planning Association, Washington Chapter (APAWA) to **express our opposition to SB 5660**, which would significantly weaken the Growth Management Act (GMA) which protects rural areas from urban encroachment. Our 1500+ members are planning professionals who advise elected and appointed officials on land use, transportation, economic development and environmental policy, enforce development regulations, administer the permit process, and provide public information to and engagement with our constituents regarding growth and change to cities, towns, counties, non-profit organizations and more.

One of the primary goals of the GMA is to protect rural areas from sprawl. However, this bill allows urban services, including sewer and water, outside of Urban Growth Areas (UGAs.) In turn, this will promote the premature conversion of land and sprawl which leads to significant negative impacts on rural uses including agriculture and forestry, as well as natural resources including rivers, streams, wetlands and wildlife habitat.

The GMA already allows expansion of urban services outside of Urban Growth Area boundaries for protection of public health and safety or the environment. This bill would allow for additional extension of urban services in areas where there is existing development inconsistent with rural character and also creates a new definition of "environmentally beneficial" which it uses to do so. In doing this, the bill appears to allow vesting of development and facilities even prior to any action of a city extending water or sewer facilities beyond the city limits and designated UGAs. Further, this bill strips property owners of predictable, equitable use of their land by giving certain properties preferential treatment.

The GMA's public process requirements are significantly curtailed under this bill. Cities and counties would be able to make the required findings without public review. After the action, there would be no methods of appeal:

- No public hearings under either the city or the county are required;
- No finding of noncompliance appeals through the Growth Management Boards are allowed;
- No review by the Boundary Reviews Boards; and
- No appeal to the courts.

2150 N. 107th Street, Suite 205
Seattle, WA 98133-9009
phone: 206-682-7436
email: office@washington-apa.org
web: www.washington-apa.org

In addition to a lack of public participation, this bill does not address the impact on existing service providers or coordination with other existing laws. Service providers are not funded in a manner to support providing urban level services in the rural area. Tasking them with doing so would require additional long-term planning and a significant investment of resources.

The appropriate process to ensure coordinated and planned urban growth is for counties to first expand their UGA boundary, consistent with adopted comprehensive plans, countywide planning policies, and state law, and then to extend urban services to support planned urban densities. The only reason for urban services to be extended beyond Urban Growth Area boundaries should be for protection of public health and safety or the environment. We urge that this bill be removed from consideration.

Respectfully,



Chad Eiken, President
American Planning Association, Washington Chapter