Livable Washington is APA’s Action Agenda for growth management

This Agenda is our assessment of Washington’s progress along the path of growth management. We are distributing this Action Agenda to State legislators, elected officials, Chapter members, and others who are interested in making planning and the Growth Management Act (GMA) work effectively. “Livable Washington” documents success stories, identifies areas that need attention, and recommends actions for legislators and planners alike.

Please use this report to inform yourself, elected and appointed officials in your area, and others who are involved in growth management. As planners, we want to make great communities happen. Washington’s GMA is a significant and innovative way to accomplish this. However, some adjustments are necessary. Together we can exert the leadership required to make these adjustments. We are proud of the results of this effort and look to you to help us make these recommendations a reality.

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UGA Growth Data
Puget Sound Regional Council
Livable Washington represents the voice of the 1,300 members of the Washington Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA). APA members include professional planners, elected officials, planning commissioners, and interested citizens who share a common interest in making great communities happen. This report is offered as a touchstone to allow our members to join together to address the issues that affect our communities. As we begin the 21st century, our shared interests are in seeing the State of Washington continue to have sustainable growth in a beautiful environment.

The process used to develop this Action Agenda encompassed the full membership and relied on the leadership of our profession. Every member of the Chapter was invited to participate in a web-based survey for a 6-week period in July and August. From those who responded, we gleaned an understanding of the range of issues and the priorities for action. At the Chapter conference in September, we hosted three sessions to explore the priority issues. At two of the sessions, invited panelists represented a range of views on these issues and discussed “what’s working and what’s not” for planning in Washington. At the third session, participants met in roundtable discussion groups to brainstorm their solutions to the priority issues. Finally, we reached out to leaders of our profession, including several who were instrumental in drafting the 1990-1991 Growth Management Act. This group formed the Blue Ribbon Panel to evaluate, debate, and form recommendations around the priority issues. Those recommendations, as revised and adopted by the Board of Directors of the Chapter, are presented here.

Successes under GMA, as well as an honest examination of GMA shortcomings, are the subjects of this report. We are not alone in calling for action. Many of our recommendations echo those of the Washington City Planning Directors’ Association, the Washington State Association of County and Regional Planning Directors, and the Washington Alliance for a Competitive Economy. Washington Chapter APA commits our Board and our membership to working with local governments, citizens, stakeholders, and State leaders in agencies and the legislature to make our vision a reality.

And what did we learn through this process?

First and foremost, great strides have been made in accommodating growth in ways that protect our resource lands and critical areas. In less than a dozen years, the Growth Management Act has shown that it does work – it can contain growth and protect our treasured landscape. Growth management planning in Washington is not “broke.”

But further action is needed if growth management is to remain successful.

- The State is seriously divided between the “haves” and the “have nots,” between urban and rural areas, and between cities and counties.
- The permitting system is breaking down under the weight of overlapping regulations that make management of growth difficult and divert planners from building great communities.
- Lack of funding for implementation has caused GMA’s failure to live up to some of its promises - its own goals – for transportation, affordable housing, and economic development.

Our image of the future plays a fundamental role in shaping our long-range plans and short-range actions. Changing the image changes the action. And, while people know that the world is changing, they consistently underestimate the scale of change in the early 21st century.

Glen Heimstra, 2002
CEO of Futurist.com
The GMA Success Story

Washington has been among the ten fastest growing states in the nation over the past decade. This growth could have resulted in sprawl dominating the countryside, weakening existing communities, and causing a massive infrastructure burden. Washington citizens wanted a better way. In 1990, the State passed the Growth Management Act (GMA), embracing a new vision for the future. The vision called for communities to be strong and vital, growing where it made sense while preserving special places.

By 1995, many of the plans created under GMA and the related development regulations were in effect. The state’s most urbanized area, the Puget Sound area, has had the greatest challenges in dealing with growth. In 2002, the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) provided a “report card” on the success of GMA for the four-county central Puget Sound Region. PSRC recognized the 1995-2000 period as “not only a unique and robust period for the economy of the region, it was also the first significant growth period since enactment and implementation of the state’s Growth Management Act” (PSRC, p.i). These findings showed that even with rapid population growth continuing (8.3% over the 5 years), 87% of that population growth occurred within urban growth areas (UGAs). Likewise, employment growth continued at a very rapid pace at 18.8%, with 96% of that growth within the urban growth boundaries. Further, each of the four counties showed increasing success over the 5-year period.

Specific stories demonstrate the tangible local results

Colville, a rural community of 5,000 people, used its growth management plan to lay the foundation for a revitalized downtown. A public-private partnership followed to solve transportation needs, focus on the downtown’s historic character, and attract new business. This effort won State and Federal funding so key improvements could be made. Now, the small city has achieved a downtown that draws people and businesses together.

Redmond, a mid-sized city east of Seattle, also used its growth management plan to spur downtown improvements. An impressive result is Town Center, a new mixed-use shopping district, arranged in a “main street” pattern that encourages walking, shopping, and socializing. Nearby, a new multi-story project, LionsGate, contains two restaurants and 200 housing units, some of which are innovative “live-work” spaces within this existing suburban city.

Puget Sound Region
Job Growth, 1995-2000

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<th>Inside UGA</th>
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<td>King</td>
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<td>Kitsap</td>
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<td>Pierce</td>
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Puget Sound Region
Population Growth, 1995-2000

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<td>King</td>
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<td>Pierce</td>
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Cheney, a college town in farm country, focused on economic development and a strong capital facilities plan. Its plan allowed Cheney to move forward on new infrastructure projects, to be proactive with businesses, and to support integrated programs coordinated with the local university. As a result, Cheney brought more than 900 new jobs to the community.

Tacoma faced a different challenge. The city’s highly polluted tidelands were bordered by vacant and deteriorating buildings. The city combined growth management planning and an environmental impact statement to expedite both the clean-up and the redevelopment projects. Today, Tacoma’s waterfront is substantially cleaner, with a healthier environment for marine life. At the same time, the deteriorated buildings have been replaced by popular public walkways, restaurants, and museums.

Franklin County, located near the Columbia River, is a leading agricultural center where a wide range of food and fiber products are grown. Yet un-concentrated sprawling development posed a threat to the continued viability of agriculture. The county has enacted growth management regulations to conserve its agricultural base. Over 645,000 acres of land have been designated for long-term agricultural use, keeping these farms and ranches off-limits to most non-agricultural development.

The small city of Sumner developed incentives and design guidelines to make new development match the growth management vision. The Daffodil Neighborhood is an example of guidelines that worked. In this neighborhood, groups of neat white houses nestle together along a traditional street grid pattern. People relax on front-porch swings, greeting their neighbors as they walk by. Here and there, a three-story building rises up, providing a place for ground-floor offices and apartments above. A large park anchors the center of the neighborhood, and a new elementary school lets kids walk from home.

Chelan and Douglas counties combined their efforts with other agencies to create a new loop trail system along the Wenatchee River. Now, an estimated 250,000 visitors per year enjoy this special trail. This facility meets GMA goals for open space and recreation and brings needed opportunities to an existing developed area.

All of these successes are examples of good planning and management of growth that enhance Washington’s livability.
This paper provides recommendations for action in four issue areas where further changes are needed to make GMA work effectively. While some of these recommendations may require a period of time to implement, all have merit and they are not listed in order of priority.

- State Level Planning Issues
- Regionalism and Governance Issues
- Rural Issues
- Regulatory Integration Issues

**State Level Planning Issues**

GMA established thirteen goals for counties and cities planning under the Act to make efficient use of urban lands, to protect critical areas and resource lands, to meet infrastructure needs concurrent with growth, to provide for affordable housing, and to foster economic development. The 1990 Report of the Governor’s Growth Strategy Commission, which served as the original framework for the GMA, identified the need for a corresponding effort at the State level to support local planning. That State level planning has not occurred. The State sets priorities and makes major funding decisions without clear consideration of the adopted local plans developed to ensure a livable future for our citizens. The State should act in consort with local government to achieve this future.

**Recommendations**

1. **Require State agency compliance with GMA.** When the GMA was crafted, specific requirements for State agency compliance were included in the Act but have not been enforced. The intervening years have demonstrated the number and range of actions taken at the State level that conflict with local jurisdictions in their efforts to comply with GMA. Recently, the requirement for the Department of Transportation to meet concurrency levels has been removed. Washington Chapter APA calls for action on State agency compliance with the GMA.

2. **Develop a State-level strategy for economic development.** Cities vie with neighboring cities and counties for new opportunities for growth and economic development. These pressures increase dramatically in a tight economy. Washington Chapter APA calls for a statewide strategy for economic development that would define priority locations for economic development with emphasis on rural areas and provide for implementation by State agencies. The strategy should be: (a) long-term, (b) diverse, (c) inclusive (e.g., east/west, small/large), (d) sustainable, and (e) focused on strategic investment. In addition, financial incentives for prioritized areas are needed to spread growth and job creation around the state.

3. **Require a State-level capital investment strategy consistent with State and local GMA plans.** Currently, while local governments must tie their 6-year capital improvement plans to their adopted GMA plan, the State has no equivalent requirements. Some of the designated urban centers are at risk due to the State’s lack of investment in regional infrastructure. Washington Chapter APA calls for State action to prepare and adopt a long range, State-level capital investment strategy linking State funding to a Statewide economic development plan and adopted local plans. The State of Maryland provides an excellent model for targeted “smart investment” strategies.
4. Develop a program to identify and protect lands and resources of statewide significance. This recommendation from the 1990 Growth Strategies Commission called for State guidelines be developed to identify and protect scenic corridors and rivers, entryways to the state or metropolitan areas, critical habitat for wildlife of State concern, historical and cultural sites, and properties necessary for a viable resource industry. Washington Chapter APA calls for the establishment of a program to identify and protect lands and resources of statewide significance and implementation, including funding, to ensure that these are permanently protected within adopted local comprehensive plans.

5. Revise existing State laws and regulations for consistency with GMA. Many existing laws and regulations pre-date the adoption of GMA. Too often, these reinforce the pattern of suburban and rural development that is counter to the purpose and intent of GMA. For example, State funding is provided for new schools in suburban areas but not for rehabilitation of existing schools in areas where urban infill is encouraged. The legislature, in its direction to the Land Use Study Commission in 1995, and the Governor’s Washington Competitiveness Council in 2002, identified GMA as the starting point for needed reform of other land use related statutes. Washington Chapter APA supports the review and revision of existing laws and regulations to build upon the policy framework and goals established by the GMA.

6. Clarify tribal role in GMA planning. Indian tribes and tribal lands not subject to the GMA have, in some instances, developed in conflict with surrounding jurisdictions. While recognizing tribal sovereignty, Washington Chapter APA calls for a constructive dialog with Federally recognized tribal governments to achieve cooperative planning by tribes with State, county, and city governments.

Regionalism and Governance Issues

GMA changed the relationship between counties and cities in their planning processes. Although countywide planning policies (CPPs) are required and cities must follow them, special districts that provide the services needed for growth are not required to prepare 20-year plans or to adopt capital facilities plans. Impacts cross jurisdictional boundaries, and impact fees do not reflect the full cost of services. Revenue sources to pay for services are limited for both the cities and the counties, straining city-county-regional cooperation. Annexations further strain relationships between jurisdictions because of imbalances between revenues and service delivery responsibilities.

Recommendations

1. Refine the State role in determining annexations. Currently, areas outside city limits and within an Urban Growth Area (UGA) are caught between decreasing county investments and lack of city responsibility, while cities have no incentive to accept areas that do not generate adequate revenues to pay for services. Washington Chapter APA calls for an amendment to GMA to require cities and counties to negotiate a logical progression and schedule of annexation for areas within adopted UGAs in coordination with new comprehensive plans or future comprehensive plan updates and to determine when communities with inadequate revenues are to be annexed and how to help receiving communities pay for the associated services. Finally, changes to State law are needed to favor annexation over incorporation.

2. Mandate revenue sharing agreements. Counties are disinvesting in areas slated for future annexation, and cities have high costs of providing services within urban areas. Revenue sharing agreements are needed to enhance city and county cooperation, as well as ensure that cross-jurisdictional impacts are addressed. Washington Chapter APA calls for a requirement that cities and counties enter into agreements on how they will share revenues as well as responsibilities for providing services for areas to be annexed. Also, Washington Chapter APA calls for State action to clarify the process by which cities assume responsibilities for services within urban
growth boundaries, especially water and sewer services.

3. Require special districts to comply with the GMA land use plans of cities and counties. GMA already requires counties and cities to work together through the CPPs and transportation issues, but does not place the same obligation on special districts. While current case law suggests special districts must act consistent with the plans of cities and counties, this is not clearly happening. Washington Chapter APA calls for changes in the GMA law to require special districts to prepare plans and actions that are consistent with regional plans and county and city comprehensive plans.

4. Strengthen regional planning. In metropolitan areas that extend beyond a single county, the existing layers of city and county governments and special districts fragment planning and conflict with growth management. Strong regional governance in these areas can bring comprehensive planning and tax and revenue issues together under one umbrella. Washington Chapter APA calls for legislative action to increase the role of regional governments for metropolitan areas that extend beyond a single county and, in other areas, to expand city-county cooperation and use of interlocal agreements as tools to address regional planning issues.

Rural Issues

GMA established definitions for resource lands and urban lands. However, rural areas are not clearly defined and have been subjected to a wide range of interpretation by counties and the Growth Management Hearings Boards (GMHBs). Rural issues need to be addressed in a comprehensive manner, with clear criteria for identification, development, and use of these lands.

Recommendations

1. Articulate a vision for rural areas. Currently, it is not clear if the GMA envisions rural areas as holding areas for future urban growth, as buffers for resource areas, as areas with values in and of themselves worth preserving, or as areas for low density residential development. Washington Chapter APA calls for the State legislature to establish policy direction for rural areas and to define rural growth limits and land uses.

2. Develop strategies and funding to preserve rural areas and resource lands. The large capacity for rural development that exists in currently platted and vested, but undeveloped, lots is limiting many counties' ability to contain growth. While some of these undeveloped lots may be appropriate for Local Areas of More Intense Rural Development (LAMIRDS) in the context of planning for rural jobs and housing, development on many of these undeveloped lots could lead to a continued pattern of low density sprawl. Washington Chapter APA calls for incentives to encourage counties to plan for the aggregation or appropriate development of these undeveloped lots.

3. Allow flexibility for LAMIRDs. While the 1997 amendments to the GMA began to address existing rural development that is not easily characterized as rural, the evolution of uses in these developed areas is still highly restricted. Rural areas need more flexibility to address changes in use and intensity of new development in these areas to provide for economic development and affordable housing. Washington Chapter APA supports the 1997 amendments that defined LAMIRDs and calls for further action to clarify and expand the definition of uses and intensity of development that may be allowed in LAMIRDs and to allow clustering of residential development.
4. Simplify and accelerate the water rights transfer process. Rural water rights can assist farmers, rural clusters, small towns, and LAMIRDs. Water rights transfers play an increasingly important role in providing adequate water supply for a wide variety of rural community needs as well as a means of sustaining streamflows. In addition, increased flexibility in water rights transfers can reduce the need for appropriate rural growth to depend on “exempt” groundwater wells for water supply. The Department of Ecology has recently increased the pace for processing water rights transfers. Washington APA calls for increased simplification and use of water rights transfers to accommodate appropriate rural growth and increase protection of open space or long-term resource lands.

5. Provide State aid for infrastructure construction to rural counties. Rural counties with high rates of poverty and loss of resource jobs are desperate to have options for family wage jobs, and may encourage inappropriate development that can undermine GMA. While inappropriate development may appear attractive initially, the cost of infrastructure to service this land is expensive, is not paid for by the development, and often encourages further conversion of rural land. Washington Chapter APA calls on the State to provide alternative sources of funds or financial incentives for capital facility planning and construction, where needed to encourage employment growth and location of jobs in priority areas consistent with a statewide economic development strategy.

6. Support long-term solutions for the sustainability of agriculture. Many farmers approach counties for changes in land use regulations for their farms because they find farming no longer economically viable. Washington Chapter APA calls for the Department of Agriculture to work with counties to bolster agricultural activities, improve the farmers’ ability to compete, and aid the farmers in their efforts to meet new water and natural resource regulations. A realistic program to financially assist rural farmers in preserving their land is essential if agricultural lands are to be saved throughout the state.

Regulatory Integration Issues

Washington is one of very few states in the nation to have three sets of land use/environmental requirements - the Shoreline Management Act (SMA), the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA), and the Growth Management Act (GMA). The addition of the Watershed Management Act (WMA) has only increased the potential for conflicting regulations. In 1995, the legislature enacted the regulatory reform statutes that partially consolidated some elements of SEPA and SMA into GMA, but failed to fully consolidate these laws. The October 2002 GMHB decision in the Everett Shorelines Coalition case further clarifies that “a local government’s shoreline master program is now part and parcel of the GMA comprehensive plan and development regulations.” Nevertheless, complex and overlapping sets of regulations add additional layers of time, expense, and confusion to an already lengthy and expensive process for jurisdictions, applicants, and the public to undertake for GMA actions.

Recommendations

1. Fully integrate SMA/SEPA/WMA/GMA. The overlapping nature of the regulations creates contradictions, allows multiple opportunities for intervention, and adds substantially to the time and cost of doing business in Washington for both the public and private sectors. Washington Chapter APA calls for State level actions to revise and simplify conflicting or overlapping regulations, including the process for permit appeals, under the overall guidance of GMA. This includes integration of GMA, SMA, and SEPA using GMA as the platform to reduce or eliminate project-level SEPA reviews when the proposal was included in a comprehensive plan’s SEPA determination. This also includes consolidation of the SMA and GMA appeals procedures for policy issues under the GMHBs. The integration also means that new State-mandated planning initiatives (such as watershed planning) should be done under the umbrella of GMA rather than as distinct programs.

2. Promote use of Planned Actions and development agreements. In concert with true integration of the laws, planning tools at the local level are needed to allow permit streamlining. Washington Chapter APA supports the use of Planned Actions and development agreements, and calls on the State to promote the use of these tools in regulatory reform and through financial support.

3. Concentrate permit issuing authority with local governments. Local governments should make all local land use decisions, including SMA permits. Local permits should follow standards set by State agency guidelines for lands and resources of statewide significance. Washington Chapter APA calls for the implementation of the newly integrated SMA/SEPA/WMA/GMA through local issuance of land use permits consistent with adopted GMA plans.
The key GMA goal of concentrating growth of population and jobs in urban areas requires urban levels of service in transportation, utilities, and capital facilities. An additional GMA goal, housing affordability for all segments of the population, defines a need for programs and funding to support housing for people with low incomes.

Yet we are confronted with successful anti-tax initiatives—resulting in a reduction in funding for infrastructure when costs and standards have risen. The structure of our tax system is out of date compared with other states. Washington is one of a handful of states without true tax increment financing and we are without a personal income tax. We burden businesses with taxes on gross receipts, making it hard for businesses to thrive. Regional retail taxes benefit one community, while drawing shoppers from another. The flaws in our tax system pit business against the interests of community development. We need more balanced and equitable sources of funds.

The Governor initiated a process in 2002 to examine the tax morass through the Washington State Tax Structure Study Committee. This committee was charged with determining how well the current tax system functions and how it might be changed to better serve the citizens of the state in the 21st century. APA recognizes the efforts of the Tax Structure Study Committee and applauds the Governor for initiating this process.

Washington Chapter APA strongly recommends major tax reforms. A revamped tax system in Washington must include new tax sources and be progressive, reliable, and fair. It should include revenue sharing along with role sharing among local governments, infrastructure investment, and business incentives. In addition, changes should be made so that Washington communities can use a variety of tools for economic development, including tax increment financing in the same manner that most other states enjoy. Such tools are needed to allow cities, rural counties, and the State, in general, to recruit modern businesses and industries that provide good paying jobs.

When an expanded and stable tax base is secured, the State should provide funding to support local planning efforts, including:

- Preparation of an open space element of local comprehensive plans,
- Preparation of an economic development element of local comprehensive plans,
- Planning and implementation of local programs for affordable housing,
- Financial support for concurrent development of infrastructure, and
- Investment in public involvement programs.

In broad and dramatic ways, I believe planners need to become pro-active advocates, not just order takers. They need to stand up for sensitive development, the long-term view, and strong socially and racially mixed communities.

- Neal Peirce, 2002
The Citistates Group
Author/Lecturer
Leadership is Essential

On both the State and local levels, responsible leaders need to stand for a Livable Washington. GMA has been least successful in the areas of transportation, housing affordability, and economic development. These are complex and intertwined issues, not easily solved by quick solutions. As housing prices push homebuyers far from centers of employment, traffic congestion inevitably grows worse. The increasing traffic congestion and decreasing housing affordability pushes businesses, like Boeing, out of Washington to other states with a better approach to these problems.

In 1990, our leaders set Washington on a path to the future designed to protect our beautiful and resource-rich environment while meeting growth needs of current and future generations. Now in the early years of the 21st century, we are at a crossroads. We must take the next steps to support GMA by the actions detailed in this report:

- Actively involve the State in planning at a statewide level and investing capital facility funds in concert with adopted GMA State and local plans;
- Address regional planning problems at a regional level and provide enhanced tools for cooperation between cities and counties;
- Establish a vision for rural lands that identifies and implements appropriate opportunities for economic development and a range of housing opportunities;
- Integrate and streamline the layers upon layers of regulations that stifle good development and deter planners from making great communities happen; and
- Address long overdue tax reform measures and provide an ongoing source of funding for quality growth management planning.

It is time for State and local officials, business people, citizens, and planners to provide leadership and participate fully in this great endeavor. Washington Chapter APA actively supports this effort and conurs with other groups who have called for urgent action to address these planning issues. Together, we can solve transportation and infrastructure problems, provide affordable housing, protect our resource base and natural environment, and maintain our quality of life. Working together, we can achieve sustainable growth and a Livable Washington for all.

Bibliography


What is your legacy going to be...?

- Ron Sims, 2002 County Executive King County, Washington