



American Planning Association  
**Washington Chapter**

*Making Great Communities Happen*

February 2, 2015

The Honorable Dean Takko  
House Local Government Committee  
267A John L. O'Brien Building  
P.O. Box 40600  
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

Dear Representative Takko and Committee Members,

The American Planning Association – Washington Chapter (APA Washington) **opposes HB 1420, School Siting**. The APA Washington is a 1,4000 member association of people with an interest in land use, housing, transportation, environmental, economic and social planning. Among others, our membership includes citizen planners, planning commissioners and other planning officials, and professional planners within the State of Washington and elsewhere.

HB 1420 amends the Growth Management Act (GMA) to require the permitting of schools in the rural area, outside of Urban Growth Areas. Let me offer the following reasons why this is bad legislation:

1. **HB 1420 would require local governments to allow schools in the rural area if specific criteria are met.**
  - This bill takes away local land use control from counties and, essentially, gives special districts authority over county land use.
  - Locating schools in rural areas means they are not going into cities; local governments need the ability to adopt land use plans in accordance with GMA and to adequately assess the local impacts of school siting.
  - Importantly, school districts and local governments have available to them the Essential Public Facilities siting process for addressing issues such as these; this bill pre-empts this local authority.
2. **Education policy is also health policy.**
  - Building schools far from where students live erases the potential of walking or bicycling.
  - Schools distant from where students and their families live increases the number of children who are driven to school in private vehicles, which increases the risk of fatal and non-fatal injuries for passengers and drivers due to car crashes. In the rural area, the risk of car crashes is higher because of higher speeds and longer distances over narrow, non-linear roads.

- Schools distant from where families live and parents work impacts the ability of parents to become and remain involved. Parental involvement in schools is strongly linked to improved academic performance throughout a school career.
- Locating schools in urban areas allows them to be a focal point of the community increasing the vibrancy and livability of the surrounding area.
- Given concerns such as these, we understand that groups such as the Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition are also opposed to this bill.

3. **This legislation applies to our state's most populous counties in regions where agreement has already been reached re: school siting. For example, in our state's most populous county, cities and the county addressed school siting in already- developed areas by working collaboratively with stakeholders.**

- *The School Siting Task Force unanimously called for future schools serving urban students to be sited in urban areas and schools serving rural students to be located in rural cities and towns. The Task Force *included rural residents, city elected officials, superintendents and leaders from all school districts with rural areas, as well as experts in land use, the environment, real estate development, and public health.**
- The Sound Cities Association (representing 36 cities and 1 million people within King County) endorsed a policy amendment to the Countywide Planning Policies to further implement the recommendations of the Task Force. The Countywide Planning Policies amendment was adopted in 2012.
- The new policy calls for mandatory annual meetings between the school districts and the cities to identify needs and requires a report be produced every 2 years to assess if the goals of the policy are being met.

APA-WA supports efforts to provide educational excellence for our children and to give school districts the tools and resources to accomplish their missions. We believe this can be done by locating schools in urban areas where the students live and where schools enrich communities. **We urge you to oppose HB 1420.** Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Ivan Miller, AICP  
President  
Washington Chapter of the American Planning Association