

# THE WILLIAM D. RUCKELSHAUS CENTER

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

## A Roadmap to Washington's Future

Washington State's framework for managing growth is a patchwork of at least a dozen laws adopted incrementally over the past century. Each responded to the circumstances and priorities of its day, including the Growth Management Act (GMA) of 1990. The primary responsibility for growth planning and implementation rests with local governments, however, cities and counties operate under governance and finance rules designed to meet the needs of the last century, not the realities, trends, opportunities, and challenges of this one. To date there has not been an assessment of how well the GMA has met its goals, nor have the purposes, processes, and requirements of older laws ever reconciled with those of the GMA.

The challenges for maintaining and improving Washington's economic, environmental, and human health in the future are great. By the year 2040, the current state population (7.2 million) could increase by 3.5 million people.<sup>1</sup> This is more than triple the combined populations of today's Seattle, Spokane and Tacoma. However, Washington's economic and population growth has not been evenly distributed across the state. Rapid growth in urban counties has worsened traffic congestion, restricted freight mobility, over-taxed crumbling infrastructure, and stressed ecosystems.

The housing affordability crisis commands headlines in the Seattle metro region, but housing costs have also risen dramatically in eastern Washington, up and down state.<sup>2</sup> In rural counties, the agricultural, forestry and mineral economies are in transition and their communities struggle to attract economic development and retain population. Some question whether the regulations needed to manage growth in urban counties is appropriate for rural counties, where the challenge instead is managing to grow.

Also growing across Washington are two different but equally acute public health challenges. Loss of open space and access to nature erodes the physical and mental health of people in rapidly urbanizing counties. Residents of rural counties enjoy far more access to both open space and nature, but various factors contribute to unacceptably lower human health outcomes than urban residents enjoy.<sup>3</sup>

### Phase I - Preliminary Assessment Purpose and Description

Washington's communities are increasingly recognizing the linkages between housing costs, transportation, economic opportunity, environmental, and human health. Navigating this complex system and effectively meeting challenges and opportunities facing the state will require a collaborative "road map to the future."

In response to queries from the Washington State Legislature and others, the William D. Ruckelshaus Center (Center) recommends conducting an assessment of Washington's framework for managing growth, including a process to articulate a statewide vision and collaboratively map a path to that future. The assessment and process for creating a collaborative road map would involve participants across the state helping to create a vision of Washington's desired future, identifying opportunities and current successes of state laws, institutions, and policies in moving toward that future, and areas for course corrections and support for implementation.

To gauge support for this effort, the Center is now conducting a Preliminary Assessment consisting of a series of informal conversations with key individuals, groups, and organizations involved in various growth management efforts. Information and findings from these preliminary conversations will be summarized in a **Preliminary Report** to be issued by June 2017.

To date, none of the individuals, groups or organizations contacted have said that an assessment of our state's growth

management framework is not needed or not timely. Below is a list of individuals, groups, and organizations the Center has spoken with as part of this Preliminary Assessment, seven of which have become sponsors of the Preliminary Assessment.<sup>4</sup> We will be updating this list frequently as the preliminary conversations continue. If you or your interest is not yet represented and/or you would like more information, please contact the project leaders identified below.

Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians	Association of Washington Business	Association of Washington Cities
Building Industry Association of Washington	<i>Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway</i>	<i>Centers for Disease Control</i>
Citizens Alliance for Property Rights	Swinomish Indian Tribal Community	<i>Master Builders of King and Snohomish Counties</i>
<i>Quinault Indian Nation</i>	<i>Futurewise</i>	The Tulalip Tribes
Washington State Boundary Review Boards Association	<i>Washington Chapter of the American Planning Association</i>	Washington City Planning Directors Association
Washington Public Health Association	Washington Public Ports Association	Washington Research Council
Washington Sewer and Water Districts Association	Washington State Association of Counties	<i>Washington State Department of Commerce</i>
Washington State Department of Ecology	Washington State Transportation Commission	Washington State Farm Bureau

## Phase II - Comprehensive Assessment and Road Map to the Future

Based upon the findings in the Preliminary Report, and the breadth of support from various groups and organizations, the legislature may direct the Center to convene and facilitate a two-year process for the Comprehensive Assessment and Road Map to Washington's Future. While still being refined, that effort would engage Washington's citizens in conversations about a desired future for our state; conduct a series of deep, candid conversations with many groups, including those identified above; and conduct targeted research by the state's public universities to help inform potential alternatives.

The **Final Report** would be a shared statewide Vision for the future of Washington and include agreed upon actions to adapt our state's growth management framework to achieve that Vision.

### For more information, contact:

**Joe Tovar**  
Project Co-Lead jtovar@uw.edu

**Amanda Murphy**  
Project Co-Lead amanda.g.murphy@wsu.edu

<sup>1</sup> The Office of Financial Management estimated that Washington's 2016 population of 7.2 million could increase by 3.5 million people to a 2040

<sup>2</sup> Between 2014 and 2015, Seattle home prices increased by 12.4%. Significant increases also happened in Mount Vernon, (13.8), Longview (13.2%), Tri-Cities (7.8%), Spokane (5.6%), Yakima (5.2%) and Walla Walla (4.8%). *Seattle Times*, 6/22/16.

<sup>3</sup> For Washington's rural counties, the rate for the five leading causes of death was 34% higher than in urban King County. Centers for Disease Control data cited in *Seattle Times*, 1/23/17.

<sup>4</sup> Phase I sponsors shown in *italics* above have committed a total of \$100,000 of seed money to support the Preliminary Assessment.

## Draft Road Map Project Schedule

