

WAC 365-196-010 Background. Through the Growth Management Act, the legislature provided a new framework for land use planning and the regulation of development in Washington state. The act was enacted in response to problems associated with uncoordinated and unplanned growth and a lack of common goals in the conservation and the wise use of our lands. The problems included increased traffic congestion, pollution, school overcrowding, urban sprawl, and the loss of rural lands.

(1) Major features of the act's framework include:

(a) A requirement that counties with specified populations and rates of growth and the cities within them adopt comprehensive plans and development regulations under the act. Other counties can choose to be covered by this requirement, thereby including the cities they contain.

(b) A set of common goals to guide the development of comprehensive plans and development regulations.

(c) The concept that the process should be a "bottom up" effort, involving early and continuous public participation, with the central locus of decision-making at the local level, bounded by the goals and requirements of the act.

(d) Requirements for the locally developed plans to be internally consistent, consistent with county-wide planning policies and multi-county planning policies, and consistent with the plans of other counties and cities where there are common borders or related regional issues.

(e) A requirement that development regulations adopted to implement the comprehensive plans be consistent with such plans.

(f) The principle that development and the providing of public facilities and services needed to support development should occur concurrently.

(g) A determination that planning and plan implementation actions should address difficult issues that have resisted resolution in the past, such as:

(i) The timely financing of needed infrastructure;

(ii) Providing adequate and affordable housing for all economic segments of the population;

(iii) Concentrating growth in urban areas, provided with adequate urban services;

(iv) The siting of essential public facilities;

(v) The designation and conservation of agricultural, forest, and mineral resource lands;

(vi) The designation and protection of environmentally critical areas.

(h) A determination that comprehensive planning can simultaneously address these multiple issues by focusing on the land development process as a common underlying factor.

(i) An intention that economic development be encouraged and fostered within the planning and regulatory scheme established for managing growth.

(j) A recognition that the act is a fundamental building block of regulatory reform. The state and local government have invested considerable resources in an act that should serve as the integrating framework for other land use related laws.

(k) A desire to recognize the importance of rural areas and provide for rural economic development.

(l) A requirement that counties and cities must periodically review and update their comprehensive plans and development regulations

to ensure continued compliance with the goals and requirements of the act.

(2) The pattern of development established in the act. The act calls for a pattern of development that consists of different types of land uses existing on the landscape. These types generally include urban land, rural land, resource lands, and critical areas. Critical areas exist in rural, urban, and resource lands. Counties and cities must designate lands in these categories and develop policies governing development consistent with these designations. The act establishes criteria to guide the designation process and to guide the character of development in these lands.

(3) How the act applies to existing developed areas. The act is prospective in nature. It establishes a framework for how counties and cities plan for future growth. In many areas, the pattern called for in the act is a departure from the pattern that existed prior to the act. As a consequence, areas developed prior to the act may not clearly fit into the pattern of development established in the act. In rural areas, comprehensive plans developed under the act should find locally appropriate ways to recognize these areas without allowing these patterns to spread into new undeveloped areas. In urban areas, comprehensive plans should find locally appropriate ways to encourage redevelopment of these areas in a manner consistent with the pattern of development envisioned by the act.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 36.70A.050 and 36.70A.190. WSR 10-03-085, § 365-196-010, filed 1/19/10, effective 2/19/10.]