
Local Government & Housing Committee

HB 1395

Brief Description: Encouraging retention and enhancement of the job base in rural counties.

Sponsors: Representatives Eickmeyer, Buck, Sump, Doumit, Kessler, Jackley, Van Luven, Haigh, Dunn, Murray, Edwards, Veloria, Romero, Hatfield, Pennington, Hunt, Ruderman, Linville, O'Brien, Conway and Santos.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Allows rural counties to allow expansion of small-scale businesses and siting of new small-scale businesses on existing business sites if compatible in size and scale with land use and development patterns in the rural element.
- Provides a definition of rural county to include a county with a population density of less than one hundred persons per square mile.

Hearing Date: 1/28/02

Staff: Scott MacColl (786-7106).

Background:

The Growth Management Act (GMA) requires a county and its cities to plan under its major requirements if the county meets certain population and growth criteria. The GMA allows counties not meeting those criteria to choose to plan. Currently, 29 of 39 Washington counties plan under the major GMA requirements (GMA jurisdictions).

The GMA requires GMA jurisdictions to adopt comprehensive plans with certain required elements. Those elements include land use, housing, a capital facilities plan, utilities, transportation, and a rural element.

The GMA comprehensive plan's rural element is to include lands that are not designated for urban growth, agriculture, forest, or mining resources. Legislation enacted in 1997 made numerous changes to rural element provisions including: (1) defining "rural character" to

focus on predominance of natural landscape, fostering of traditional rural lifestyles, provision of rural landscapes, and compatibility with habitat and prevention of sprawl; (2) defining "rural development" to include a variety of uses and densities, other than agriculture and forestry, that are consistent with rural character; (3) amending the definition of "urban growth" to provide that a pattern of more intensive rural development is not urban growth; (4) including small-scale businesses (not defined) in rural development and describing small-scale businesses and cottage industries as those not required to serve the rural population; (5) adding "rural development" provisions, including allowing "infill, development, or redevelopment of existing commercial, industrial, residential, or mixed-use areas," subject to the requirement to "minimize and contain" the existing areas so as not to extend beyond their logical outer boundaries; and (6) adding 'intensification' provisions for rural nonresidential uses or new development of isolated cottage industries and small scale businesses not principally designed to serve the rural population but that provide job opportunities for rural residents.

Summary of Bill:

Rural counties that are GMA jurisdictions may allow the expansion of small-scale businesses and the siting of new small-scale businesses on existing business sites if these businesses are compatible in size and scale with land use and development patterns in the rural element of the comprehensive plan.

Rural counties are defined to be counties with population densities of less than one hundred people per square mile as determined each year by the Office of Financial Management. Currently, 31 of Washington's 39 counties qualify under this definition.

A small-scale business is defined to be any business that is owned or operated independently and that is of a size and scale that is compatible with adjacent land uses and existing or planned infrastructure, and if in a rural area, is consistent with the rural character of the area as defined by the rural element of the comprehensive plan. If the business is outside the rural area, the business must be consistent with the neighborhood character, as established by the local government in which it is located.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not Requested.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.