
Local Government Committee

ESSB 5593

Brief Description: Concerning urban growth area boundaries.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Housing & Local Government (originally sponsored by Senators Short, Lovelett, Gildon, Hasegawa and Mullet).

Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill

- Allows a county to make revisions to an urban growth area boundary to accommodate patterns of development under certain conditions.
- Provides that any revision to an urban growth area boundary cannot increase the total surface area of the urban growth area, and that any areas removed from the urban growth area cannot have been characterized by urban growth.

Hearing Date: 2/22/22

Staff: Kellen Wright (786-7134).

Background:

The Growth Management Act (GMA) requires that certain counties, and the cities within those counties, engage in planning for future population growth. The central part of the planning process is the comprehensive plan. The Legislature has established 14 goals that should act as the basis of all comprehensive plans. Examples of goals include reducing sprawl, providing for affordable housing, and protecting property rights. The comprehensive plan must address these goals and set out the policies and standards that are meant to guide the city or county's actions and decisions in the future. These plans are required to be updated every eight years and must contain certain elements, such as a land use element, a housing element, and a capital facilities plan. These elements must satisfy the requirements for each individual element while fitting

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within the overall comprehensive plan.

One aspect of the comprehensive plan that must be reviewed and revised every eight years is the designation of urban growth areas (UGAs). Urban growth is growth that makes such intensive use of land for buildings, structures, and impermeable surfaces that is unsuitable to be used primarily for agriculture, natural resource use and management, or for rural uses. A UGA is an area designated by a county planning under the GMA inside of which urban growth is encouraged, and outside of which urban growth is prohibited. Each city must be included in an urban growth area, and a UGA can include more than one city within its boundaries. Areas outside of a city can also be included within a UGA, if the areas are already characterized by urban growth.

The Office of Financial Management provides population projections to counties. Using these projections, each county must ensure that areas and densities within a UGA are sufficient to permit the urban growth that is projected to occur in the county or city over the next 20 years. Each UGA must permit urban densities and provide for greenbelts and open spaces. Each city must include areas sufficient to accommodate the broad range of needs and uses that will accompany the population growth, including government, medical, commercial, and other nonresidential uses.

Urban government services include those services that are typically provided in cities, including storm and sewer systems, domestic water systems, public transit, public safety, and other services associated with urban areas and not associated with rural areas. Urban government services are most appropriately provided by cities, and cannot generally be extended into rural areas. Urban growth should be located first in areas already characterized by urban growth that possess adequate public facilities and services to accommodate the growth; second in areas with urban growth that may need additional services to accommodate the growth; and third in the remaining portions of an urban growth area.

When reviewing and revising its comprehensive plan, a county must review its designated UGAs and the densities permitted within each UGA. Together with this county review, cities must review the densities permitted within their boundaries, and the extent to which the urban growth that has occurred has been in each city or in unincorporated areas of the county. County and city comprehensive plans must be revised to accommodate the urban growth projected to occur in the next 20 years.

Counties or cities planning under the GMA are required to designate critical areas, including wetlands, fish and wildlife habitat, and other areas, and must also designate agricultural lands, forestlands, and mineral resource lands. Cities and counties must adopt development regulations protecting these areas.

Summary of Bill:

When reviewing its designated UGAs, a county must also review the patterns of development

within the urban growth areas.

If a county that is reviewing its UGAs determines that revision of the area is not required to accommodate the projected urban growth in the succeeding 20-years, but that patterns of development have created pressure in areas that exceed the available developable lands within the UGA, then the UGA may be revised to accommodate these identified patterns of development under certain conditions. In order for such a revision to occur:

- the revised UGA may not result in an increased total surface area for the UGA;
- the areas added to the UGA have never been designated as agricultural, forest, or mineral resources lands of long-term commercial significance;
- less than 15 percent of the areas added to the UGA are critical resource areas;
- the areas added are suitable for urban growth;
- the transportation element and capital facilities plan element of the comprehensive plan have identified the facilities and services needed to serve the UGA and the funding to provide these facilities and services;
- the areas that are removed from the UGA when the new areas are added are not characterized by urban growth or urban densities; and
- the revised UGA is contiguous, without holes or gaps, and will not increase pressure to urbanize rural or natural resource lands.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.