

GROWTH MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW: URBAN GROWTH AREA, RURAL AREAS AND ANNEXATION

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The **Growth Management Act (GMA)** is a state law passed in 1990 and amended several times thereafter. It requires the largest and fastest growing counties and the cities within those counties to develop rational policies to accommodate growth in Washington. GMA requires these jurisdictions to develop and adopt comprehensive land use and zoning plans consistent with the policies in GMA, and to adopt regulations to implement these plans.

GMA requires city and county comprehensive plans address issues including land use, transportation, housing, facilities and services, utilities, natural environment and economic development.

GMA also required cities and counties to work together to develop a set of framework policies to guide development of their individual comprehensive plans. These framework policies are known as the **Countywide Planning Policies**, or “**CPPs**.” In King County, the CPPs were first adopted in 1992. The CPPs have been amended several times. GMA requires that county and city comprehensive plans be consistent with the CPPs.

As required by GMA, the King County CPPs establish the **Urban Growth Area (UGA)** which delineates the area into which future growth will be directed. All areas inside the UGA are considered urban and areas outside the UGA are considered as **rural or resource lands**.

The King County CPPs set forth a long-term vision whereby in 20 years from their first adoption (so, by 2012), all urban areas of King County should be part of cities—preferably through the process of **annexation**, but in some cases by incorporation of new cities. This vision is summarized in the following three excerpts from the CPPs:

- “Cities are the appropriate provider of local urban services to Urban Areas either directly or by contract. Counties are the appropriate provider of most Countywide services. Urban services shall not be extended through the use of specific purpose districts without the approval of the city in whose potential annexation area the extension is proposed. Within the Urban Area, as time and conditions warrant, cities should assume local urban services provided by special purpose districts.” **FW-13**
- “In order to transition governmental roles so that the cities become the provider of local urban services and the County becomes the regional government providing countywide and rural services, unincorporated Urban Growth Areas are encouraged to annex or incorporate within the 20-year timeframe of these policies. To achieve this goal, all cities that have identified potential annexation areas shall enter into interlocal agreements with King County that includes a plan for development standards and financing of capital and operating expenditures during the period prior to annexation.” **RF-5**
- “In collaboration with adjacent counties and cities and King County, and in consultation with residential groups in affected areas, each city shall designate a potential annexation area. Each potential annexation area shall be specific to each city. Potential annexation areas shall not overlap. Within the potential annexation

area, the city shall adopt criteria for annexation, including conformance with Countywide Planning Policies, and a schedule for providing urban services and facilities within the potential annexation area. This process shall ensure that unincorporated urban islands of King County are not created between cities and strive to eliminate existing islands between cities.” **LU-31**

As noted, both City and County comprehensive plans – setting forth land use and zoning -- must be consistent with the CPPs. GMA and the CPPs allow for some flexibility to modify zoning and residential density requirements as between jurisdictions. That is, County urban zoning and city urban zoning can differ and still be consistent with the CPPs. Development standards—covering issues such as road width, surface water drainage facilities, street lighting, etc.--can also vary extensively from one urban area to another.

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