III. GROWTH MANAGEMENT ACT

Nisqually Farm
III. Growth Management Act Land Use Goals and County-Wide Planning Policies

The Growth Management Act has thirteen specific planning goals. Two of the specific goals provide a major thrust in urban development patterns. These statements are:

A. **Urban Growth**: Encourage development in urban areas where adequate public facilities and services exist or can be provided in an efficient manner.

B. **Reduce sprawl**: Reduce the inappropriate conversion of undeveloped land into sprawling low-density development.

These two goals can be considered the guiding principles in desired urban development patterns. To properly implement this concept, the idea of urban growth boundaries was developed, and each county and local jurisdiction has been required to designate specific areas for urban growth to take place. The underlying concept is for a certain area to be designated for urban growth where growth can be planned to occur in an orderly and efficient manner, considering the provision of necessary services and the conservation of land by its wise use. It is expected that urban growth can be confined to specified areas. Utility planning, transportation planning and capital facilities planning become easier and the cost of providing services becomes more efficient.

Additionally, confining urban growth to specified areas will help conserve rural areas which are better utilized for other purposes, such as resource conservation.

Another major benefit is the conservation of property by a more intensive and therefore economical and efficient use of land. In the past, land resources have been consumed in a disproportionate rate, considering population growth. In short, the amount of land being consumed to support our population is considered to be much more than necessary. By controlling urban growth and limiting it to certain areas, a jurisdiction can expect more economic use of the land and as such make available more undeveloped land resources for future generations.

As part of the Growth Management Act process to implement GMA goals, the County and local jurisdictions got together to agree upon countywide planning policies. Countywide planning policies were agreed to by local jurisdictions and signed September 8, 1992. The agreed upon countywide planning policies mirror requirements of the GMA and were to provide a blueprint for crafting GMA plans.

Four of the countywide planning policies deal specifically with issues relating to land use. These include designation and amendment of the Urban Growth Area, promotion of contiguous and orderly development, the provision of urban services, joint County and City planning, and the siting of countywide and statewide public capital facilities.

Designation of urban growth areas is one of the first requirements of the Growth Management...
Act; Thurston County and the local jurisdictions actually had accomplished most of the work regarding this issue prior to the time the GMA became law. The urban growth boundaries have been utilized by Thurston Regional and the City of Lacey, along with other data, to accomplish the vacant lands study and population estimates and projections for growth. The urban growth boundaries can be considered the foundation for implementation of GMA requirements for local land use planning. The second issue was the promotion of contiguous and orderly development and provision of urban services. This strikes at the heart of the GMA requirements. The County and local jurisdictions adopted policies to accommodate urban development in the growth area, coordinate urban services planning and standards and to provide capacity to accommodate planned growth. Inside the urban growth areas, the County policies also provide for joint City and County planning. According to these policies, each city assumes lead responsibility for preparing the joint plan, in cooperation with the County. Joint planning is then expected to serve as the basis for County planning decisions that will act as the pre-annexation comprehensive plan during annexations and provide both City and County surety in zoning decisions.

The countywide planning policies provide for a rational and fair process for siting of essential public facilities. Essential public facilities are public facilities and privately owned or operated facilities serving a public purpose that are typically difficult to site. They include:

A. Airports; state education facilities; state or regional transportation facilities; prisons, jails and other correctional facilities; solid waste handling facilities; inpatient facilities such as group homes, mental health facilities and substance abuse facilities; sewage treatment facilities; communication towers and antennas; and secure community transition facilities.

B. Facilities identified by the State Office of Financial Management as essential public facilities, consistent with RCW 36.70A.200.

C. Facilities identified as essential public facilities in the City’s zoning ordinance.

The countywide planning policies also include a number of other policies that deal with fiscal and economic considerations, affordable housing, transportation, and environmental quality.

Robert Patrick

Bob was Lacey’s first full time planner hired in 1985 as the Community Development Director. Bob was responsible for negotiation of Lacey’s first urban growth boundaries prior to adoption of the State Growth Management Act. As the Director, Bob was responsible for overseeing development of Lacey’s first GMA Plan in 1994.