How do Growth Management decisions contribute to my Quality of Life?

When population grows, available land must be shared with new residents. Planning gives us a framework for making tough decisions about where that growth should occur. Centering growth in the city core and close-in suburbs protects rural and resource lands and reinforces a sense of community. Cities benefit because there are more people to support a wider variety of businesses and services within a short travel distance to more households.

How do local comprehensive plans relate to state-level growth management?

Each city and county within Washington State prepares its own comprehensive plan to fit together under the guidelines of the Growth Management Act. Comprehensive plans, written by planners and concerned citizens, help regulate development, conserve natural resources, and guide economic growth. Development regulations are the tools prepared to carry out the plans.

How does the Growth Management Act affect my rights to do what I want with my property?

The Growth Management Act contributes to stability within the real estate market because comprehensive plans define areas of development. People know the "rules" for development and can get a fair return on their investment. One of the thirteen statewide goals of the Growth Management Act is to respect property rights.

Good planning reduces the element of risk so that both you, as a property owner, and your neighbors know what to expect.

When and how can I get involved in the comprehensive planning process?

Amendments to comprehensive plans and development regulations may be adopted annually. At least once every seven years, a complete review of each city or county comprehensive plan and development regulations is mandatory. So, it's never too late to have your voice heard.

All meetings are public, and many communities are trying new methods to include more citizens in the process of planning. Look online for your community's planning process and for ways to participate, visit your local library to find a copy of the plan, and go to your city hall to talk to your local planning staff. They want to hear from you!

Why should I get involved in updating my local comprehensive plan?

Each community in our state is charged with the responsibility to plan for people, jobs, housing, and natural resources. When citizens get involved in the planning process, they can help determine priorities and shape the future of their communities.

It is important for you to know how and why your government makes growth and development decisions. You can help decide how fast and where urban growth can occur. When you participate, the comprehensive plan works for you!

The American Planning Association can connect you to many sources for additional information about planning in Washington:

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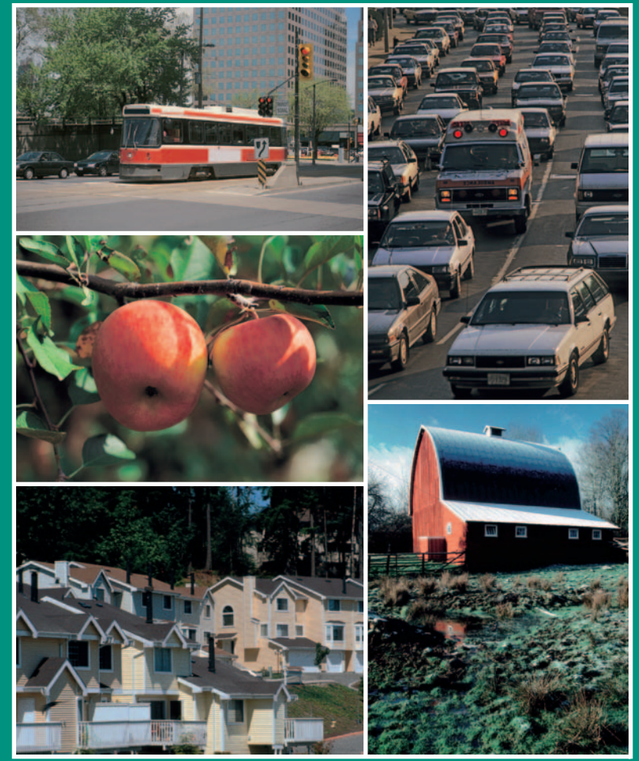
Growth Management



How does it work for you?

Why do governments plan?

Planning in America started in the early 1900s as polluting, noisy industries were built alongside growing residential areas, creating health and safety hazards for residents. Citizens urged the government to pass laws regulating land use to protect their homes and families.

After World War II, Federal funding supported the construction of highways and led to the development of homes well beyond city limits. Construction of new suburbs grew tremendously over the next half century, spreading development over once-rural areas and weakening city centers. By 1990, Washington State was at a crossroads where we could choose to continue to subsidize development outside cities or to conserve rural, farm, and forest lands. State leaders adopted legislation for the management of growth so that future generations will also be able to enjoy the abundance and diversity that Washington State has to offer.

Today, thanks to planning and regulation, we have grown to expect healthy and safe neighborhoods. In addition, planning works to protect Washington's natural beauty, conserve farmlands, and maintain renewable forest areas. Planning walkable communities with access to nature improves the health of residents.

Which growth pattern do you value?

These images illustrate two distinct approaches to growth and development: unregulated, and managed development. Which growth pattern do you value?

Without growth boundaries, low-density, car-dependent development pushes beyond the reaches of city limits into the countryside, requiring the public to pay for new roads and infrastructure, eroding the viability of farming and forestry.

Managed growth brings together Washington cities' and counties' comprehensive plans which preserve the rural and natural landscape, manage development, and provide for anticipated future growth.

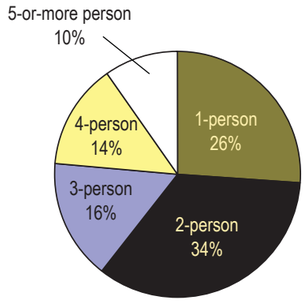
Why do governments have the responsibility to regulate development?

Government regulates development to promote health, safety, and the public good.

Development of private lands requires public money. New housing and commercial developments require infrastructure such as new roads, sewers, and utility lines. Communities also require social services like fire and police departments, libraries, schools, and parks. All this infrastructure is costly, and, as taxpayers, we all pay to support new development. These costs are higher per household when development is spread out.

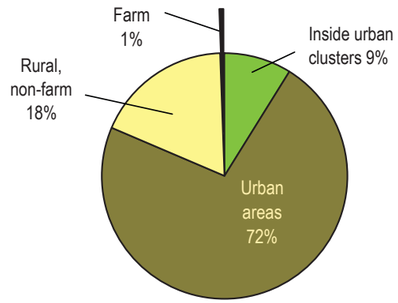
Did you know?

More than half of Washington households have 2 people or less



Washington household size in 2000

Only 1% of Washington households live on farms today, compared to the past



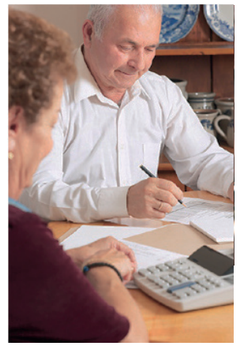
Washington State household locations in 2002

What's wrong with building more subdivisions?

We all have to pay to support development.

Most studies show that people want choices. Some people want a single-family house in the suburbs, but others prefer a farm in the country or a condominium in the city. Sprawling subdivisions spread out development and use a lot of land. They may suit the needs of some, yet the price to support their development is subsidized by everyone.

What does Growth Management offer taxpayers?



Fair treatment – The Growth Management Act requires public participation in developing and updating comprehensive plans. Everyone has a voice in determining future growth in their community.

Predictability – Comprehensive plans provide a reasonable expectation for future growth. Property owners have the security of knowing they can develop their land according to the comprehensive plan.

Why Growth Management is good for city residents:

- Growth management encourages new development to take place in existing urban areas where new streets and utilities are less expensive to taxpayers.
- Growth management supports a growing economy, more jobs, and a strong tax base for city services.
- Growth management promotes affordable housing, neighborhood schools, and community parks concurrent with new development.
- By establishing fair treatment and predictability for urban growth, communities can choose if they want to grow faster or slower.

Why Growth Management is good for farmers:

- Growth management limits development near farmlands and keeps property tax and land values affordable to farmers.
- Growth management protects valuable farmland from the pressure to develop.
- Growth management limits encroaching rural residential development; thus, fewer farming-practice restrictions are imposed.
- By protecting farmland through managing growth, Washington can sustain the land necessary to continue boasting that we are number one in the U.S. for production of apples, hops, spearmint oil, sweet cherries, and pears.