

# Washington State's Growth Management Act

## A Framework for Smart Growth



Anne Aurelia Fritz, AICP  
Growth Management Services  
Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## The GMA – A Framework for Smart Growth

Washington's Growth Management Act (GMA) was not about telling communities how to grow, it was intended to help communities plan for growth we knew was coming, and fund infrastructure along the way.

Joe King



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## The GMA – A Framework for Smart Growth

- ◆ Washington before the GMA
- ◆ Conception of the GMA
- ◆ GMA 101
- ◆ 15 years into GMA
- ◆ Top five lessons



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Washington Before the GMA

Local comprehensive planning was optional and uncoordinated. 1970s brought two new state laws:

- ◆ Planning for shore zone development – Shoreline Management Act (SMA) – outgrowth of public initiative. RCW 90.58
- ◆ Environmental permitting for significant projects – State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) – state version of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). RCW 43.21



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Conception of the GMA

- ◆ Late 1980s – State population growth increasing rapidly adding one million people every 12 years.



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Conception of the GMA

- ◆ Noticeable loss of greenness from development in Puget Sound area
- ◆ Sprawl development into rural areas, loss of farmland
- ◆ Traffic congestion increased



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Conception of the GMA

- ◆ Staff looked at Florida, Oregon, Georgia, and New Jersey for models
- ◆ Local government planning directors met to propose model
- ◆ Growth Strategies Commission spent a year developing a strategy for implementation
- ◆ Neal Peirce published a series of articles in the Seattle Times
- ◆ Grassroots public support



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Conception of the GMA

- ◆ Six legislature committee chairs, dubbed Steel Magnolias, passed separate bills which were combined and resulted in the 1990 GMA legislation
- ◆ Perception that 1990 GMA had no “teeth” but granted deference to local decision making
- ◆ Environmental movement proposed a top-down land-use initiative which failed
- ◆ 1991 brought another law that added GMA enforcement



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## GMA 101 – The Land Speaks First

All lands assigned to three categories:

- ◆ Resource lands and critical areas are to be designated and conserved/protected
- ◆ Designated urban areas are to be developed at urban densities
- ◆ Rural areas to be protected to retain rural character



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## GMA 101 – Outline

- ◆ Goals
- ◆ Requirements for all communities
  - Resource Lands
  - Critical Areas
- ◆ Fully Planning communities
  - County-wide policies
  - Urban growth areas
  - Comprehensive plan
  - Consistent regulations
- ◆ Enforcement



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## GMA 101 – Goals

- ◆ 13 equally important original goals
- ◆ Local jurisdictions decide how to address and balance the goals



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## GMA 101 – Goals

1. Direct urban growth to urban areas
2. Reduce sprawl
3. Provide multimodal transportation
4. Plan for affordable housing – variety of densities
5. Ensure economic development



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## GMA 101 – Goals

6. Conserve open space and resource lands and protect critical areas
7. Process permits fairly and in a timely manner
8. Maintain and enhance natural resource industries
9. Retain open space, enhance recreational opportunities
10. Protect the environment



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## GMA 101 – Goals

11. Encourage citizen participation in decision making
12. Provide public facilities and services to serve development
13. Encourage historic preservation
14. Manage shorelines wisely (added in 1995)



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## GMA 101 – Resource Lands

Classify, designate, and conserve:

- ◆ Forest lands
- ◆ Agricultural lands
- ◆ Mineral lands



---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## GMA 101 – County-wide Planning Policies (CWPP)

Regional policy framework to:

- ◆ Designate urban growth areas
- ◆ Jointly plan within urban growth areas
- ◆ Site county-wide or state-wide facilities
- ◆ Consider need for affordable housing
- ◆ Plan for economic development




---

---

---

---

---

---

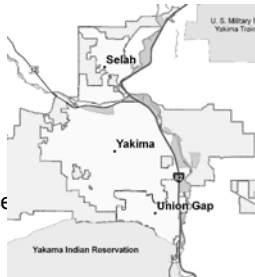
---

## GMA 101 – Urban Growth Areas

Designate urban growth areas (UGAs)

Size UGAs using:

- ◆ 20-year population allocation from state
- ◆ Land capacity analysis
- ◆ Provision of adequate public facilities and service




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## GMA 101 – Comprehensive Plans

### Required Elements

- ◆ Land Use
- ◆ Housing
- ◆ Transportation
- ◆ Capital Facilities
- ◆ Utilities
- ◆ Shorelines
- ◆ Rural (Counties only)

### Optional Elements

- ◆ Economic Development – if state funding provided
- ◆ Parks and Recreation – if state funding provided




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## GMA 101 – Development Regulations

Regulations  
implement the plan

- ◆ Zoning
- ◆ Subdivision ordinance
- ◆ Critical areas ordinance
- ◆ Stormwater management
- ◆ Street standards
- ◆ Design review ordinance
- ◆ Clearing and grading ordinance
- ◆ Concurrency ordinance



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## GMA 101 – Concurrency

- ◆ Transportation (required)
- ◆ Sewer
- ◆ Water
- ◆ Utilities
- ◆ Parks
- ◆ Fire
- ◆ Police



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## GMA 101 – Enforcement

- ◆ Three regional growth management hearings boards
- ◆ Boards review plans and regulations
- ◆ Plans and regulations presumed valid upon adoption



---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## Role of State in GMA

Technical assistance from CTED includes:

- ◆ Guidance on GMA requirements
- ◆ Planning grants (currently about \$2.5 million per year)
- ◆ Review of plans and regulations, coordination with other state agencies
- ◆ Planning education
- ◆ Appeals to GMHB



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 15 Years into GMA

- 1990 GMA passed
- 1994 First round of plans due
- 1995 Regulatory reform to streamline permitting under GMA, SEPA, SMA
- 1995 Best available science
- 1995 Rural amendments
- 2004 First update to plans due
- 2005 Urban planning approaches to promote physical activity



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 15 Years into GMA

### GMA Tools

- ◆ Planned actions – upfront environmental analysis (SEPA)
- ◆ Commute Trip Reduction Law (RCW 70.94.521-551 – passed in 1990)
- ◆ Multi-family Tax Credit (RCW 84.14 – passed in 1995)
- ◆ Capital Planning Template (CTED technical assistance)



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 15 Years into GMA

- ◆ Importance of planning recognized
- ◆ Public process institutionalized
- ◆ Higher density and infill
- ◆ Design standards
- ◆ Suburban cities developing town centers
- ◆ Stronger critical area protections
- ◆ Planning helping to prioritize capital facility investment – public and private



---

---

---

---

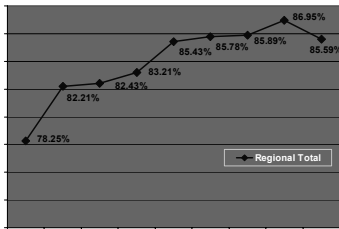
---

---

---

## 15 Years into GMA

Urban development as a percent of total permits



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Continuing Challenges

- ◆ Affordable housing
- ◆ Density issues
- ◆ Updates to initial plans
- ◆ Locally determined BAS for critical areas protection
- ◆ Water availability
- ◆ Infrastructure financing – initiative process limits tax increases
- ◆ Initiative focusing on property rights



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Top Five Lessons from the GMA

1. GMA accepted as the framework for planning decisions
2. Meaningful public participation strengthens local planning decisions
3. GMA provides tools to focus public investment and the certainty to encourage private investment
4. GMA framework reducing sprawl
5. Capital facility planning provides a reality check on the plan



STATE OF WASHINGTON  
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY,  
TRADE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## Growth Management Services

*Annef@cted.wa.gov*  
360-725-3000  
*www.cted.wa.gov/growth*

## Resources

RCW 36.70A  
15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Report  
10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Report

### Photos

Experience Washington  
[www.experiencewashington.com/  
Pressroom/press\\_pid-  
101500.html](http://www.experiencewashington.com/Pressroom/press_pid-101500.html)

CTED -- Growth Management  
Services

