

Thurston County
COUNTY-WIDE PLANNING POLICIES
November 10, 2015

These policies were adopted by the Board of County Commissioners on September 8, 1992. They were ratified earlier by each of the seven cities and towns within Thurston County. Those seven cities and towns are Lacey, Olympia, Tumwater, Bucoda, Rainier, Tenino and Yelm. On August 2, 1993, representatives of Thurston County and the seven cities and towns met to clarify intent of policies 1.2 and 1.3 and to affirm long and short term Urban Growth boundaries established in 1988 around Olympia, Lacey and Tumwater. In 2002, policies were amended to be consistent with RCW 36.70A.215 (“Buildable Lands Program”). In 2015, the policies were amended to incorporate foundational principles and policies from Creating Places, Preserving Spaces, A Sustainable Development Plan for the Thurston Region, December 2013.

Background: The Growth Management Act calls for the faster growing counties and cities within their borders to undertake new planning to prepare for anticipated growth. New parts are to be added to the Comprehensive Plans of these counties and cities, and those plans are to be coordinated and consistent. The framework for this coordination are county-wide planning policies, developed by each county, in collaboration with its cities and towns. These are Thurston County’s county-wide planning policies which will be used to frame how the Comprehensive Plans of Thurston County and the seven cities and towns will be developed and coordinated.

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I. GENERAL POLICIES

(Adopted November 10, 2015)

- 1.1 Balance our needs today with those of future residents, to protect and enhance quality of life and in recognition that each generation is a trustee of the environment for succeeding generations.
- 1.2 Preserve and promote awareness of our historic, cultural, and natural heritage.
- 1.3 Develop new ways to cultivate and support respectful civic engagement and participation by residents, and public, private, and nonprofit businesses and organizations, encouraging choices and offering information that contribute to individual, household, and community health and well-being.
- 1.4 Break down institutional barriers to communication and cooperation, fostering open communication and transparent processes that encourage community-wide participation.
- 1.5 Think broadly, regionally, and globally – act locally. Acknowledge the interdependence of communities both within and external to our region, recognizing the impacts of our region upon the world, as well as the impacts of the world upon our region.
- 1.6 Translate vision to policy and act on adopted local plans and policies. Consider the effects of decisions on achieving this vision, while balancing individual property rights with broader community needs and goals.
- 1.7 Monitor progress and shift course when necessary. Use meaningful, easy-to-understand methods to measure progress on key objectives. Respond and adapt to future social, economic, and environmental challenges.
- 1.8 Partner across topic areas and jurisdictional boundaries. While supporting local decision-making, encourage regional and cross-jurisdictional coordination, communication, and cooperation that increase our capacity to make decisions for the common good across jurisdiction boundaries.
- 1.9 Build and maintain distinct communities, preserving and enhancing the character and unique identities of the existing urban, suburban, and rural communities in a way that protects what matters most, while offering additional opportunities to improve on what can be better.
- 1.10 Meet basic human needs of clean water and air, healthy food, adequate housing, quality education, public safety, and equal access, regardless of socio-economic status.
- 1.11 Support education, employment, commercial opportunities, cultural, social, and recreational opportunities in appropriate places and at a scale that supports community health and well-being.
- 1.12 Champion energy efficiency and renewable energy strategies that contribute to energy independence, economic stability, reduced climate impacts, and long-term household and community health.
- 1.13 Protect the natural environment while acknowledging the interdependence of a healthy environment and a healthy economy.
- 1.14 Provide for adequate active and passive recreational opportunities.

II. URBAN GROWTH AREAS

(June 5, 1992, Adopted September 8, 1992, Amended November 10, 2015)

- 2.1 Urban growth within Thurston County is to occur only in designated urban growth areas.
- 2.2 The boundaries of designated urban growth areas must meet the following criteria:
 - a. Contain areas characterized by urban growth.
 - b. Be served by or planned to be served by municipal utilities.
 - c. Contain vacant land, or under-developed land with additional capacity, near existing urban areas that is capable of supporting urban development.
 - d. Be compatible with the use of designated resource lands and critical areas.
 - e. Follow logical boundaries.
 - f. Consider citizen preferences.
 - g. Be of sufficient area and densities to permit the urban growth that is projected to occur in the succeeding twenty-year period.
- 2.3 Amendments to the urban growth boundaries must use the following process:
 - a. Cities and towns will confer with the county about boundary location or amendment.
 - b. Proposed boundaries are presented to the Urban Growth Management (UGM) subcommittee of Thurston Regional Planning Council, which makes a recommendation directly to the Board of County Commissioners.
 - c. Following a public hearing, the Board of County Commissioners designates the boundaries and justifies its decision in writing.
 - d. Cities and towns not in agreement with the boundary designation may request mediation through the State Department of Commerce.
 - e. At least every 10 years, growth boundaries will be reviewed based on updated 20-year population projections.
 - f. Appeals of decisions made through this process are per the State Growth Management Act, RCW 36.70A.
- 2.4 Expansion of the Urban Growth Boundary must demonstrate consistency with:
 - a. All of the following criteria:
 - i. For South County jurisdictions: the expansion area can and will be served by municipal water and transportation in the succeeding 20 years. South County jurisdictions must demonstrate that the expansion can be served by sewage disposal measures that provide for the effective treatment of waste water in the succeeding 20 years.
 - ii. For North County jurisdictions: the expansion area can and will be served by municipal sewer, water, and transportation in the succeeding 20 years.
 - iii. Urbanization of the expansion area is compatible with the use of designated resource lands and with critical areas.
 - iv. The expansion area is contiguous to an existing urban growth boundary.
 - v. The expansion is consistent with these County-Wide Planning Policies.

- b. One of the two following criteria:
 - i. There is insufficient land within the Urban Growth Boundary to permit the urban growth that is forecast to occur in the succeeding 20 years; or
 - ii. An overriding public interest demonstrating a public benefit beyond the area proposed for inclusion would be served by moving the Urban Growth Boundary related to protecting public health, safety and welfare; enabling more cost-effective, efficient provision of sewer or water; and enabling the locally adopted Comprehensive Plans to more effectively meet the goals of the State Growth Management Act.

2.5 Reduction of the Urban Growth Boundary must demonstrate consistency with all of the following criteria:

- a. Sufficient land will remain within the reduced Urban Growth Boundary to permit the urban growth that is forecast to occur in the succeeding 20 years.
- b. The reduced Urban Growth Boundary will include cost-effective sewer and water and transportation service areas, as applicable for each urban growth area.
- c. Reduction of the Urban Growth Boundary is compatible with the use of the designated resource lands and with critical areas.

**III. PROMOTION OF CONTIGUOUS AND ORDERLY DEVELOPMENT,
PROVISION OF URBAN SERVICES, AND PROTECTION OF RURAL AREAS**
(August 19, 1992, Adopted September 8, 1992, Amended November 10, 2015)

- 3.1 Concentrate development in urban growth areas and protect rural areas by:
- a. Accommodating the county's growth first and foremost in the urban growth areas and ensuring that development occurring in rural areas is rural in character.
 - b. Encouraging infilling first within those parts of the urban growth areas that are:
 - i. Already characterized by urban growth that has adequate existing public facilities and service capacities to serve such development,
 - ii. Second, in areas already characterized by urban growth that will be served adequately by a combination of both existing public services and facilities, that are provided by either public or private sources, and
 - iii. Third, in the remaining portions of the urban growth areas.
 - c. Phasing urban development and facilities outward from core areas.
 - d. Establishing mechanisms to ensure average residential densities sufficient to enable the county as a whole to accommodate its 20-year population projection.
 - e. Limiting growth in rural areas to prevent sprawl and the overburdening of rural services, maintain rural character, and protect the natural environment.
 - f. Prohibiting urban net densities in rural areas.
 - g. Designating rural areas for low intensity, non-urban uses that preserve natural resource lands, protect rural areas from sprawling, low-density development and assure that rural areas may be served with lower cost, non-urban public services and utilities.
 - h. Where urban services and utilities are not yet available, requiring development to be configured so urban growth areas may eventually infill and become urban.
 - i. Considering innovative development techniques.
- 3.2 Coordinate Urban Services, Planning, and Development Standards through:
- a. Maximizing the use of existing infrastructure and assets, and leveraging the value of these in building vital, healthy, and economically viable communities.
 - b. Making public investments that further multiple community goals, target identified priorities, and leverage additional investment.
 - c. Considering both economies of scale and long-term maintenance cost when investing in infrastructure.
 - d. Providing and maintaining municipal services (water, sewer, solid waste, public safety, transportation, and communication networks) in a sustainable, and cost-effective manner.
 - e. Coordinating planning and implementation of policies regarding urban land use, parks, open space corridors, transportation, and infrastructure within growth areas. Developing compatible development standards and road/street level of service standards among adjoining jurisdictions.
 - f. Developing, and ensuring the enforcement of, agreements between Thurston County and the cities and towns within its borders, that ensure development occurring within unincorporated urban growth areas is consistent with city utility and storm water planning and conforms to the development standards and road/street level of service standards of the associated city or town.

IV. JOINT COUNTY AND CITY PLANNING WITHIN URBAN GROWTH AREAS

(August 19, 1992, Adopted September 8, 1992, Amended November 10, 2015)

- 4.1 Thurston County and the cities and towns within its borders will jointly plan the unincorporated portions of urban growth areas.
- 4.2 Each city and town will assume lead responsibility for preparing the joint plan for its growth area in consultation with the county and adjoining jurisdictions.
 - a. The lead city or town and the county will jointly agree to the level and role of county involvement at the outset of the project, including the role of each jurisdiction's planning commission.
 - b. A scope of work, schedule and budget will be jointly developed and individually adopted by each jurisdiction.
 - c. The process will ensure participation by area residents and affected entities.
- 4.3 The jointly adopted plan or zoning will serve as the basis for county planning decisions and as the pre-annexation comprehensive plan for the city to use when annexations are proposed.
- 4.4 Each joint plan or zoning will include an agreement to honor the plan or zoning for a mutually agreeable period following adoption of the plan or annexation.
- 4.5 Nothing in these policies shall be interpreted to change any duties and roles of local governmental bodies mandated by state law; for example, statutory requirements that each jurisdiction's planning commission hold hearings and make recommendations on comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances.