
**Master Builders Association of King and Snohomish Counties’
Legislative Changes to the Growth Management Act**

1. The GMA should require cities to meet their housing targets.

Housing and economic development go hand-in-hand. Therefore, it is critical that our region meets the Growth Management Act’s goal of creating new housing near employment centers.

To that end, we need policies that encourage more density in urban areas, such as requiring a minimum density of four dwelling units per acre in cities and offering more incentives for cities to annex. We should also resist efforts by some cities to increase minimum lot sizes and institute unnecessary building moratoriums.

In short, we need to put some teeth into reaching housing targets through the use of incentives and sanctions.

2. The GMA should do more to encourage development of designated urban centers.

Unfortunately, the rules governing new development in urban centers are often very complex, driving up the cost of projects and sometimes even forcing the private sector to abandon potential development opportunities altogether. We must do our part to make sure cities revise zoning codes and land use regulations that are outdated and confusing.

The GMA must emphasize more intense development of urban centers by offering real incentives, such as greater building heights, 100 percent lot coverage and simpler codes.

3. “Best Available Science” should be clarified, or eliminated from the GMA altogether.

Currently, the GMA requires the inclusion of “best available science” in the development of critical areas policies and regulations; however, it does not clearly define what that means. The problem is, there is very little agreement on the science behind critical area buffers. For example, we are concerned that some jurisdictions relied on studies conducted in other parts of the country to justify large buffer increases during critical area updates, while ignoring local studies that consider local topography and existing regulations.

This is significant because increased buffers quickly consume very large buildable areas, resulting in dramatically rising land and home prices and further eroding the ability of working families to afford adequate and accessible housing. Increased

buffers also run counter to GMA's fundamental goals of directing growth toward our urban areas and limiting sprawl.

We believe that any scientific studies used in an attempt to justify increased buffers must 1) consider the environmental benefits of existing codes and regulations and 2) be based on information collected inside the affected area.

Any "Best Available Science" reform measure that is enacted should provide credible experts to avoid any "top down" version of "best available science" from the Washington State Dept. of Ecology and allow for escalated review of projects if certain things are mitigated.

4. Concurrency should no longer be mandated under GMA.

Concurrency is particularly challenging, especially relating to traffic. It makes absolutely no sense to require urban growth areas on the one hand, and then on the other hand to mandate level of service standards for roads can't dip below a certain capacity in order to accept growth. All this policy serves to do is drive development someplace else in the region and exacerbate traffic congestion elsewhere.

Traffic concurrency is a significant regulatory barrier to providing market-rate housing in our fast-growing urban areas. Concurrency should not be a state mandate – projects should be allowed to move forward based on what city or county decision makers determine they can tolerate, want to do or need to do in order to satisfy their GMA housing requirements.

5. Jurisdictions collecting transportation impact fees should be prohibited from instituting housing moratoria based on traffic concurrency.

If a jurisdiction has the ability to collect impact fees, it should use them to fix whatever deficiency caused it to be non-concurrent.

6. The GMA should be amended to include a no-net loss of buildable lands policy.

Such a policy would compensate for the reduction in housing units that necessarily occur any time a new public policy – such as increased wetland buffers in urban areas or increases in stormwater vault sizes – is adopted.

Any change that reduces our buildable land supply, and in turn our housing capacity, would have to include measures to increase density in the urban growth area or increase land availability, including moving the Urban Growth Boundary. This change is critical for balancing the GMA's 14 goals and encouraging the goal of affordable housing.

7. GMA-based impact fees should be phased out.

Impact fees are unfair, placing an undue burden on new homebuyers. There is no proportional relationship between a new household's impact on traffic, schools and other infrastructure and what they're charged in impact fees.

New homebuyers are only "new" until the first day they move into their new house. Then that homebuyer is paying property, sales and other taxes, just like any other resident, for roads, schools, parks and so on. The reality is that impact fees disproportionately affect new homebuyers, especially those at or below the median family income. What is more, new homebuyers are forced to pay for the fee with interest over the life of the mortgage.

Impact fees are also unreliable. They are a one-time only assessment and will never replace other fees or taxes in being a good, stable source of revenue. Both the homebuyer and the state would be better served if a more stable, long-term type of user fee were used.

8. In the absence of phasing out GMA-based impact fees, cities should be required to spend impact fees to facilitate infrastructure upgrades within four years, instead of the current six-year timeframe.

Just as cities collecting transportation impact fees should be prohibited from adopting building moratoria based on concurrency, local jurisdictions should be held accountable for making infrastructure improvements in a timely manner.

9. The GMA should place more emphasis on its housing affordability goal.

This can be accomplished by requiring cities to adopt a common set of building standards instead of each jurisdiction adopting its own, increasing enforcement of permitting timelines and prohibiting mandatory inclusionary housing programs that only serve to drive up the cost of market-rate housing.

10. The State should provide public outreach and education on the benefits of GMA required density and urban growth areas.

Local builders fight battles over density and suffer through constant appeals from individuals seeking to stop growth. The public doesn't want more density in their neighborhood, but they don't see that rural and forestlands are being preserved as the other side of the equation. The state must be willing to help the public better understand the benefits of GMA required density.