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MEMORANDUM

July 14, 2011

TO: County Council
Planning Commission

C: Pete Rose, County Administrator
René Beliveau, Community Development and Planning Director

FROM: Jonathan W. Cain 

RE: Relationship Between Goals and Requirements of the GMA

BACKGROUND

The Council and others have asked our office to clarify the roles of the goals and requirements of the Growth Management Act. We expect this subject to be a frequent topic during the County's continuing work on potential amendments to critical areas regulations. The following memorandum describes the relationship between GMA goals and requirements; the goals are attached for your reference.

ISSUE

What is the relationship between the goals and requirements of the Growth Management Act?

LAW

San Juan County is required to plan under the Growth Management Act ("GMA"). The GMA contains many specific requirements, for example, a requirement to designate critical areas. The

GMA also contains a list of thirteen goals. The purpose of these goals is explained in RCW 36.70A.020 as follows:

The following goals are adopted to guide the development and adoption of comprehensive plans and development regulations of those counties and cities that are required or choose to plan under RCW 36.70A.040. The following goals are not listed in order of priority and shall be used exclusively for the purpose of guiding the development of comprehensive plans and development regulations...

A complete copy of RCW 36.70A.020, which lists the goals, is attached.

Additionally, RCW 36.70A.480(1) adds a goal for shoreline areas of the County:

(1) For shorelines of the state, the goals and policies of the shoreline management act as set forth in RCW 90.58.020 are added as one of the goals of this chapter as set forth in RCW 36.70A.020 without creating an order of priority among the fourteen goals....

A copy of RCW 90.58.020 is attached.

ANALYSIS

In analyzing the County's duties under the GMA, we look to the statute, the courts, and the Growth Management Hearings Board for direction. First, it is apparent that the County must satisfy the mandatory "requirements" of the GMA. Second, the development and adoption of comprehensive plans and development regulations, including critical areas, must be "guided by" the goals of the GMA. Thus, compliance with the GMA involves both its goals and requirements.

The Washington Supreme Court writes that, as a general principle:

It should be noted that from the beginning the GMA was riddled with politically necessary omissions, internal inconsistencies, and vague language. The GMA was spawned by controversy, not consensus....

With regard to the GMA goals, the Court writes that:

[W]hile the GMA goals collectively convey some conceptual guidance for growth management the GMA explicitly denies any order of priority among

the thirteen goals and it is evident that some of them are mutually competitive. (Citations omitted.)

So what does it mean to be guided by the goals of the GMA? Washington Supreme Court decisions which analyze the goals hold that the goals are generally tied to specific requirements in the GMA. The Court has also held that the primary method required for meeting the goals it has analyzed is compliance with the statute. See *Quadrant Corp. v. Growth Management Hearings Board*, 154 Wn.2d. 224 (2005).

As an illustration, in *Quadrant*, a citizens' group argued that King County's designation of an area as a "fully contained community" under the GMA did not comply with the goal to reduce sprawl. The Court reasoned that because King County complied with the statutory processes and criteria in the GMA for fully contained communities, the county was guided by the GMA goals.

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that the County focus on satisfying the requirements of the GMA in order to carry out the GMA goals. It is appropriate to consider the goals when evaluating the various ways in which the requirements may be met. In considering the goals, it is important to remember that the goals are not prioritized and may be mutually competitive. Although this framework may seem to lack clarity, it is the framework of the GMA.

JWC/tb

Enclosures

Agricultural lands—Legislative directive of growth management act: See note following RCW 7.48.305.

Building permits—Evidence of adequate water supply required: RCW 19.27.097.

Expediting completion of projects of statewide significance—Requirements of agreements: RCW 43.157.020.

Impact fees: RCW 82.02.050 through 82.02.100.

Population forecasts: RCW 43.62.035.

Regional transportation planning: Chapter 47.80 RCW.

Subdivision and short subdivision requirements: RCW 58.17.060, 58.17.110.

36.70A.010 Legislative findings. The legislature finds that uncoordinated and unplanned growth, together with a lack of common goals expressing the public's interest in the conservation and the wise use of our lands, pose a threat to the environment, sustainable economic development, and the health, safety, and high quality of life enjoyed by residents of this state. It is in the public interest that citizens, communities, local governments, and the private sector cooperate and coordinate with one another in comprehensive land use planning. Further, the legislature finds that it is in the public interest that economic development programs be shared with communities experiencing insufficient economic growth. [1990 1st ex.s. c 17 § 1.]

36.70A.011 Findings—Rural lands. The legislature finds that this chapter is intended to recognize the importance of rural lands and rural character to Washington's economy, its people, and its environment, while respecting regional differences. Rural lands and rural-based economies enhance the economic desirability of the state, help to preserve traditional economic activities, and contribute to the state's overall quality of life.

The legislature finds that to retain and enhance the job base in rural areas, rural counties must have flexibility to create opportunities for business development. Further, the legislature finds that rural counties must have the flexibility to retain existing businesses and allow them to expand. The legislature recognizes that not all business developments in rural counties require an urban level of services; and that many businesses in rural areas fit within the definition of rural character identified by the local planning unit.

Finally, the legislature finds that in defining its rural element under RCW 36.70A.070(5), a county should foster land use patterns and develop a local vision of rural character that will: Help preserve rural-based economies and traditional rural lifestyles; encourage the economic prosperity of rural residents; foster opportunities for small-scale, rural-based employment and self-employment; permit the operation of rural-based agricultural, commercial, recreational, and tourist businesses that are consistent with existing and planned land use patterns; be compatible with the use of the land by wildlife and for fish and wildlife habitat; foster the private stewardship of the land and preservation of open space; and enhance the rural sense of community and quality of life. [2002 c 212 § 1.]

36.70A.020 Planning goals. The following goals are adopted to guide the development and adoption of comprehensive plans and development regulations of those counties

and cities that are required or choose to plan under RCW 36.70A.040. The following goals are not listed in order of priority and shall be used exclusively for the purpose of guiding the development of comprehensive plans and development regulations:

(1) Urban growth. Encourage development in urban areas where adequate public facilities and services exist or can be provided in an efficient manner.

(2) Reduce sprawl. Reduce the inappropriate conversion of undeveloped land into sprawling, low-density development.

(3) Transportation. Encourage efficient multimodal transportation systems that are based on regional priorities and coordinated with county and city comprehensive plans.

(4) Housing. Encourage the availability of affordable housing to all economic segments of the population of this state, promote a variety of residential densities and housing types, and encourage preservation of existing housing stock.

(5) Economic development. Encourage economic development throughout the state that is consistent with adopted comprehensive plans, promote economic opportunity for all citizens of this state, especially for unemployed and for disadvantaged persons, promote the retention and expansion of existing businesses and recruitment of new businesses, recognize regional differences impacting economic development opportunities, and encourage growth in areas experiencing insufficient economic growth, all within the capacities of the state's natural resources, public services, and public facilities.

(6) Property rights. Private property shall not be taken for public use without just compensation having been made. The property rights of landowners shall be protected from arbitrary and discriminatory actions.

(7) Permits. Applications for both state and local government permits should be processed in a timely and fair manner to ensure predictability.

(8) Natural resource industries. Maintain and enhance natural resource-based industries, including productive timber, agricultural, and fisheries industries. Encourage the conservation of productive forest lands and productive agricultural lands, and discourage incompatible uses.

(9) Open space and recreation. Retain open space, enhance recreational opportunities, conserve fish and wildlife habitat, increase access to natural resource lands and water, and develop parks and recreation facilities.

(10) Environment. Protect the environment and enhance the state's high quality of life, including air and water quality, and the availability of water.

(11) Citizen participation and coordination. Encourage the involvement of citizens in the planning process and ensure coordination between communities and jurisdictions to reconcile conflicts.

(12) Public facilities and services. Ensure that those public facilities and services necessary to support development shall be adequate to serve the development at the time the development is available for occupancy and use without decreasing current service levels below locally established minimum standards.

(13) Historic preservation. Identify and encourage the preservation of lands, sites, and structures, that have historic

or archaeological significance. [2002 c 154 § 1; 1990 1st s. c 17 § 2.]

36.70A.030 Definitions. Unless the context clearly requires otherwise, the definitions in this section apply throughout this chapter.

(1) "Adopt a comprehensive land use plan" means to enact a new comprehensive land use plan or to update an existing comprehensive land use plan.

(2) "Agricultural land" means land primarily devoted to the commercial production of horticultural, viticultural, floricultural, dairy, apiary, vegetable, or animal products or of berries, grain, hay, straw, turf, seed, Christmas trees not subject to the excise tax imposed by *RCW 84.33.100 through 84.33.140, finfish in upland hatcheries, or livestock, and that has long-term commercial significance for agricultural production.

(3) "City" means any city or town, including a code city.

(4) "Comprehensive land use plan," "comprehensive plan," or "plan" means a generalized coordinated land use policy statement of the governing body of a county or city that is adopted pursuant to this chapter.

(5) "Critical areas" include the following areas and ecosystems: (a) Wetlands; (b) areas with a critical recharging effect on aquifers used for potable water; (c) fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas; (d) frequently flooded areas; and (e) geologically hazardous areas.

(6) "Department" means the department of commerce.

(7) "Development regulations" or "regulation" means the controls placed on development or land use activities by a county or city, including, but not limited to, zoning ordinances, critical areas ordinances, shoreline master programs, official controls, planned unit development ordinances, subdivision ordinances, and binding site plan ordinances together with any amendments thereto. A development regulation does not include a decision to approve a project permit application, as defined in RCW 36.70B.020, even though the decision may be expressed in a resolution or ordinance of the legislative body of the county or city.

(8) "Forest land" means land primarily devoted to growing trees for long-term commercial timber production on land that can be economically and practically managed for such production, including Christmas trees subject to the excise tax imposed under *RCW 84.33.100 through 84.33.140, and that has long-term commercial significance. In determining whether forest land is primarily devoted to growing trees for long-term commercial timber production on land that can be economically and practically managed for such production, the following factors shall be considered: (a) The proximity of the land to urban, suburban, and rural settlements; (b) surrounding parcel size and the compatibility and intensity of adjacent and nearby land uses; (c) long-term local economic conditions that affect the ability to manage for timber production; and (d) the availability of public facilities and services conducive to conversion of forest land to other uses.

(9) "Geologically hazardous areas" means areas that because of their susceptibility to erosion, sliding, earthquake, or other geological events, are not suited to the siting of commercial, residential, or industrial development consistent with public health or safety concerns.

(10) "Long-term commercial significance" includes the growing capacity, productivity, and soil composition of the land for long-term commercial production, in consideration with the land's proximity to population areas, and the possibility of more intense uses of the land.

(11) "Minerals" include gravel, sand, and valuable metallic substances.

(12) "Public facilities" include streets, roads, highways, sidewalks, street and road lighting systems, traffic signals, domestic water systems, storm and sanitary sewer systems, parks and recreational facilities, and schools.

(13) "Public services" include fire protection and suppression, law enforcement, public health, education, recreation, environmental protection, and other governmental services.

(14) "Recreational land" means land so designated under **RCW 36.70A.1701 and that, immediately prior to this designation, was designated as agricultural land of long-term commercial significance under RCW 36.70A.170. Recreational land must have playing fields and supporting facilities existing before July 1, 2004, for sports played on grass playing fields.

(15) "Rural character" refers to the patterns of land use and development established by a county in the rural element of its comprehensive plan:

(a) In which open space, the natural landscape, and vegetation predominate over the built environment;

(b) That foster traditional rural lifestyles, rural-based economies, and opportunities to both live and work in rural areas;

(c) That provide visual landscapes that are traditionally found in rural areas and communities;

(d) That are compatible with the use of the land by wildlife and for fish and wildlife habitat;

(e) That reduce the inappropriate conversion of undeveloped land into sprawling, low-density development;

(f) That generally do not require the extension of urban governmental services; and

(g) That are consistent with the protection of natural surface water flows and groundwater and surface water recharge and discharge areas.

(16) "Rural development" refers to development outside the urban growth area and outside agricultural, forest, and mineral resource lands designated pursuant to RCW 36.70A.170. Rural development can consist of a variety of uses and residential densities, including clustered residential development, at levels that are consistent with the preservation of rural character and the requirements of the rural element. Rural development does not refer to agriculture or forestry activities that may be conducted in rural areas.

(17) "Rural governmental services" or "rural services" include those public services and public facilities historically and typically delivered at an intensity usually found in rural areas, and may include domestic water systems, fire and police protection services, transportation and public transit services, and other public utilities associated with rural development and normally not associated with urban areas. Rural services do not include storm or sanitary sewers, except as otherwise authorized by RCW 36.70A.110(4).

(18) "Urban governmental services" or "urban services" include those public services and public facilities at an inten-

- 90.58.310 Designation of shorelines of statewide significance by legislature—Recommendation by director, procedure.
- 90.58.320 Height limitation respecting permits.
- 90.58.340 Use policies for land adjacent to shorelines, development of.
- 90.58.350 Nonapplication to treaty rights.
- 90.58.355 Hazardous substance remedial actions—Procedural requirements not applicable.
- 90.58.360 Existing requirements for permits, certificates, etc., not obviated.
- 90.58.370 Processing of permits or authorizations for emergency water withdrawal and facilities to be expedited.
- 90.58.380 Adoption of wetland manual.
- 90.58.515 Watershed restoration projects—Exemption.
- 90.58.550 Oil or natural gas exploration in marine waters—Definitions—Application for permit—Requirements—Review—Enforcement.
- 90.58.560 Oil or natural gas exploration—Violations of RCW 90.58.550—Penalty—Appeal.
- 90.58.570 Consultation before responding to federal coastal zone management certificates.
- 90.58.580 Shoreline restoration projects—Relief from shoreline master program development standards and use regulations.
- 90.58.590 Local governments authorized to adopt moratoria—Requirements—Public hearing.
- 90.58.600 Conformance with chapter 43.97 RCW required.
- 90.58.610 Relationship between shoreline master programs and development regulations under growth management act governed by RCW 36.70A.480.
- 90.58.900 Liberal construction—1971 ex.s. c 286.
- 90.58.910 Severability—1971 ex.s. c 286.
- 90.58.911 Severability—1983 c 138.
- 90.58.920 Effective date—1971 ex.s. c 286.

Marine oil pollution—Baseline study program: RCW 43.21A.405 through 43.21A.420.

90.58.010 Short title. This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the "Shoreline Management Act of 1971". [1971 ex.s. c 286 § 1.]

90.58.020 Legislative findings—State policy enunciated—Use preference. The legislature finds that the shorelines of the state are among the most valuable and fragile of its natural resources and that there is great concern throughout the state relating to their utilization, protection, restoration, and preservation. In addition it finds that ever increasing pressures of additional uses are being placed on the shorelines necessitating increased coordination in the management and development of the shorelines of the state. The legislature further finds that much of the shorelines of the state and the uplands adjacent thereto are in private ownership; that unrestricted construction on the privately owned or publicly owned shorelines of the state is not in the best public interest; and therefore, coordinated planning is necessary in order to protect the public interest associated with the shorelines of the state while, at the same time, recognizing and protecting private property rights consistent with the public interest. There is, therefore, a clear and urgent demand for a planned, rational, and concerted effort, jointly performed by federal, state, and local governments, to prevent the inherent harm in an uncoordinated and piecemeal development of the state's shorelines.

It is the policy of the state to provide for the management of the shorelines of the state by planning for and fostering all reasonable and appropriate uses. This policy is designed to insure the development of these shorelines in a manner which, while allowing for limited reduction of rights of the public in the navigable waters, will promote and enhance the public interest. This policy contemplates protecting against adverse effects to the public health, the land and its vegeta-

tion and wildlife, and the waters of the state and their aquatic life, while protecting generally public rights of navigation and corollary rights incidental thereto.

The legislature declares that the interest of all of the people shall be paramount in the management of shorelines of statewide significance. The department, in adopting guide lines for shorelines of statewide significance, and local government, in developing master programs for shorelines of statewide significance, shall give preference to uses in the following order of preference which:

- (1) Recognize and protect the statewide interest over local interest;
- (2) Preserve the natural character of the shoreline;
- (3) Result in long term over short term benefit;
- (4) Protect the resources and ecology of the shoreline;
- (5) Increase public access to publicly owned areas of the shorelines;
- (6) Increase recreational opportunities for the public in the shoreline;
- (7) Provide for any other element as defined in RCW 90.58.100 deemed appropriate or necessary.

In the implementation of this policy the public's opportunity to enjoy the physical and aesthetic qualities of natural shorelines of the state shall be preserved to the greatest extent feasible consistent with the overall best interest of the state and the people generally. To this end uses shall be preferred which are consistent with control of pollution and prevention of damage to the natural environment, or are unique to or dependent upon use of the state's shoreline. Alterations of the natural condition of the shorelines of the state, in those limited instances when authorized, shall be given priority for single family residences and their appurtenant structures, ports, shoreline recreational uses including but not limited to parks, marinas, piers, and other improvements facilitating public access to shorelines of the state, industrial and commercial developments which are particularly dependent on their location on or use of the shorelines of the state and other development that will provide an opportunity for substantial numbers of the people to enjoy the shorelines of the state. Alterations of the natural condition of the shorelines and shorelands of the state shall be recognized by the department. Shorelines and shorelands of the state shall be appropriately classified and these classifications shall be revised when circumstances warrant regardless of whether the change in circumstances occurs through man-made causes or natural causes. Any areas resulting from alterations of the natural condition of the shorelines and shorelands of the state no longer meeting the definition of "shorelines of the state" shall not be subject to the provisions of chapter 90.58 RCW.

Permitted uses in the shorelines of the state shall be designed and conducted in a manner to minimize, insofar as practical, any resultant damage to the ecology and environment of the shoreline area and any interference with the public's use of the water. [1995 c 347 § 301; 1992 c 105 § 1; 1982 1st ex.s. c 13 § 1; 1971 ex.s. c 286 § 2.]

Finding—Severability—Part headings and table of contents not law—1995 c 347: See notes following RCW 36.70A.470.

90.58.030 Definitions and concepts. As used in this chapter, unless the context otherwise requires, the following definitions and concepts apply: