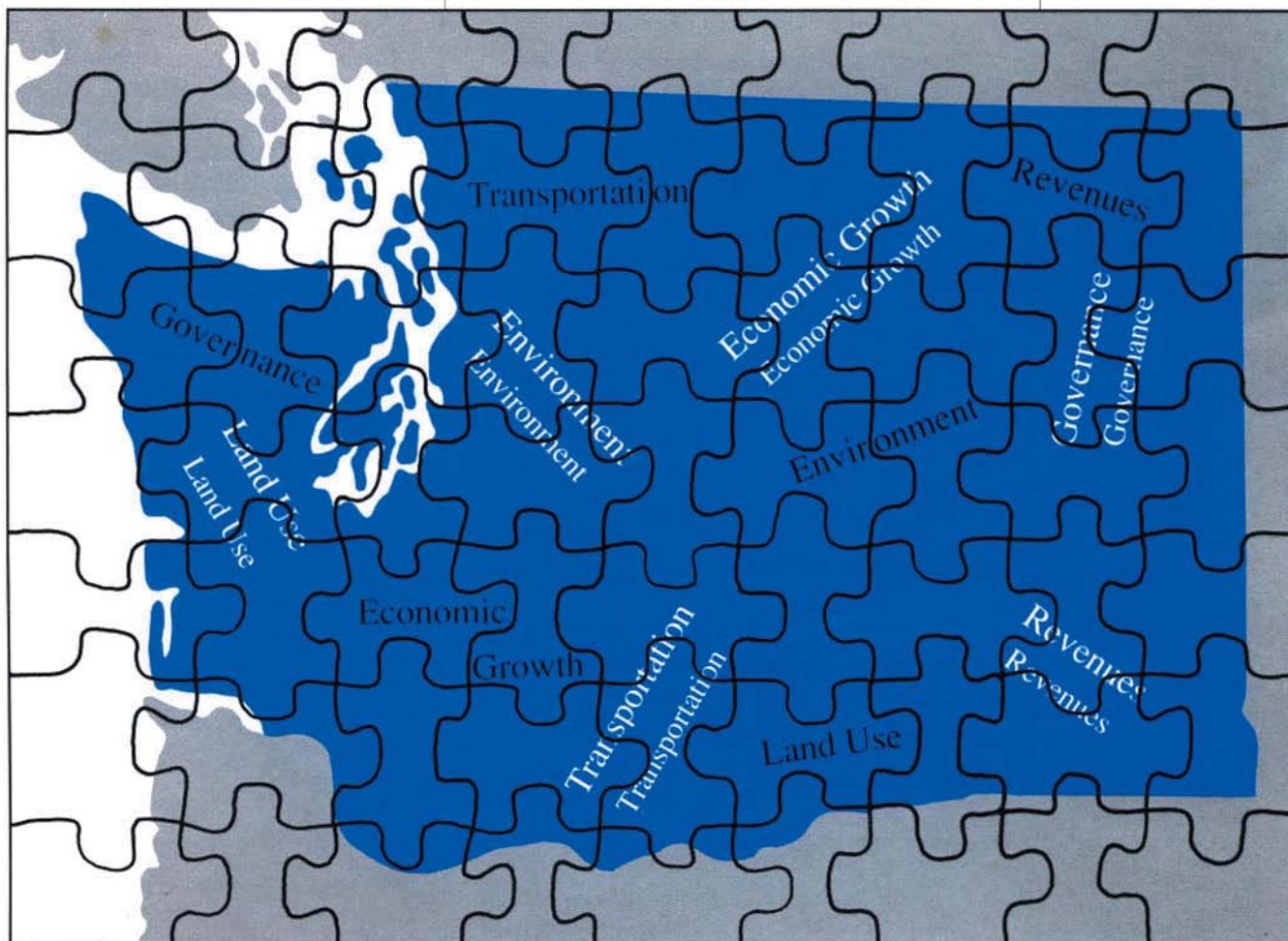


Toward a Growth Strategy for Washington

Washington City Planning Directors Association
Washington State Association of County and Regional Planning Directors



November 1989



The Growth Strategies Conference at Crescent Bar

In September of 1989, sixty directors of public planning agencies from throughout Washington State convened for three days at Crescent Bar. Our conference focus was the Growth Strategies Commission and our objective was to help define critical growth and development issues and principles to address those issues. These planning professionals came from cities large and small, counties rural and urban, and regions with both boom and bust economies. We came from such diverse cities as Bellevue, Hoquiam, Pullman, and Spokane, and counties such as Cowlitz, King, Walla Walla, and Yakima.



What we shared in common was our knowledge of how the present system of planning in Washington State operates, our commitment to the public interest, and our belief in a comprehensive approach to problem solving. We are convinced of the need to consider the long-term consequences of present actions, and the interrelatedness of decisions. In short, we believe in a strategic approach to the management of growth.

The degree of consensus achieved at our conference was surprising in view of the great diversity of circumstances throughout the state. We concluded that the well-being of each community is related to and depends upon the well-being of the region in which it is located. This, in turn, has a relationship to the well-being of other regions and of the state as a whole. We found this to be true whether we are speaking of economic health or environmental quality. These quality-of-life issues are mutually dependent and statewide in scope and significance.

The planning directors concluded that there should be a significant change in the public policies and programs that guide urban development in Washington. A new growth strategy should be built upon several guiding principles and take the form of changes to state laws governing planning and development. Following is a summary of the critical issues and problems that we see facing the state and suggested guidelines for a new growth management law.

Critical Issues

Washington is a state of great diversity, and yet a number of issues are of critical state-wide importance. The struggle to achieve desirable growth is a common theme across the state and in many cases the solutions are beyond the reach of local communities. Issues of statewide significance include:



1. Balanced distribution of economic development throughout the state



2. Protection and management of natural resources - water, air, timber, range, agricultural lands, shoreline, etc.



3. Curtailment of urban sprawl



4. Siting of needed major facilities, such as waste disposal sites and regional airports

5. Housing for all economic segments of society



6. Services to the disadvantaged



7. Education



8. Transportation and urban mobility

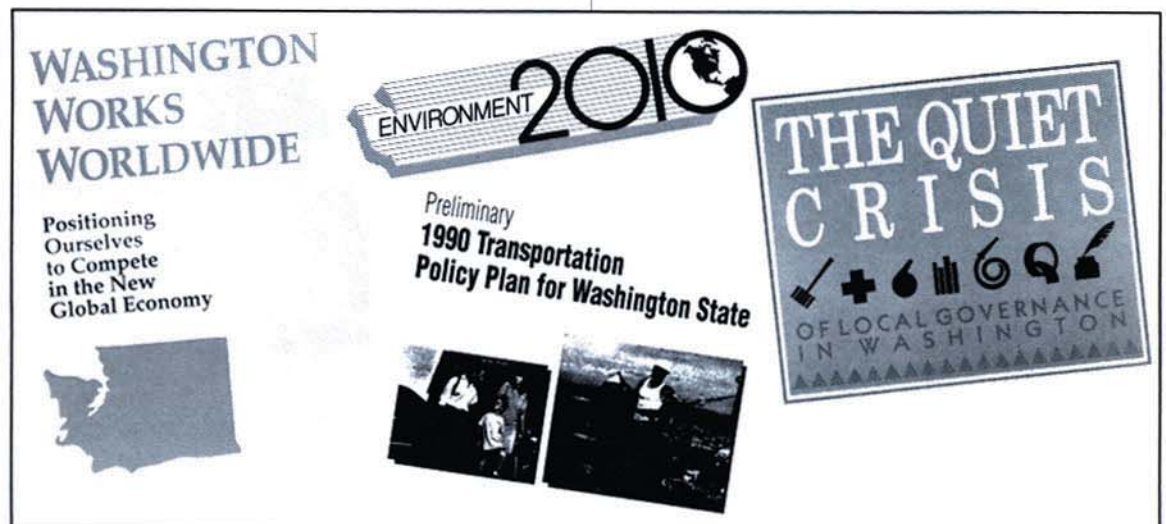
Problems with Washington's Present System

Washington State's present system for planning is ad hoc, disjointed, and lacks a central vision. The laws governing land use and development are a patchwork enacted over the past century - a constitution written to address the problems of the 1880s, planning enabling statutes adopted in the 1930s and environmental acts passed in the 1970s. These laws do not constitute a coherent and effective state strategy to manage growth and in many cases work against that objective.

At the state level, agencies send uncoordinated, and even conflicting messages to local government, to private developers, and the public. Each pursues a narrow and exclusive mandate on an independent schedule without the guidance of an adopted state vision of the desired future. Prime examples are the Trans-

portation 1990 Plan, the Environment 2010 report, and the Washington Works Worldwide economic development strategy. Each effort proceeded with independent direction, staffs, and constituencies, each with their own vision of the future and attendant priorities. Each of these major policy efforts is scheduled to make major recommendations prior to completion of the work of the Growth Strategies Commission. Without each of these efforts working toward a central vision of the desired future, it should be no surprise when the pieces of the puzzle do not fit.

At the local level, problems include competition for development and taxes, incompatible development standards, and lack of agreement on basic direction. Decisions on regional facilities, such as water supply and jails are





often approached out of self protection rather than mutual need. Regional agencies are voluntary, and without power to resolve fundamental disagreements. At the same time, regions have pressing needs to agree on basic approaches to transportation, housing supply, water supply, sewage treatment, and solid and hazardous waste disposal sites.

Local governments in Washington work under one of the weakest mandates for comprehensive planning of any state. If cities and counties wish to adopt comprehensive plans, the law only requires that the plan address land use and circulation. With the notable exception of the Shoreline Management Act, there is no state requirement that any unit of government actually prepare a plan nor is there policy guidance on issues of statewide significance. Unlike Florida, Oregon, and California, state law in Washington does not require that local plans make sense with those of neighboring jurisdictions or take into account regional needs. Without a mandate to plan and to do so cooperatively, local governments take a piecemeal, reactive and adversarial approach to resolving mutual impacts.



Another key problem is that Washington State law does not require that zoning or major capital improvement decisions follow a jurisdiction's own adopted plans. The resulting inconsistencies undermine effective planning, cause uncertainty for the public and the development community, hamstring the coordination of public and private capital improvements, and inject delay into land use decisions. We wouldn't build a house by relying on assorted subcontractors to make independent decisions about the foundation, the framing, the plumbing, and the electrical systems. We would require that each follow the guidance of a blueprint that clearly shows the desired finished product and how the system components must go together to achieve this overall vision. We should do no less in creating and realizing visions for our state and its communities.



Guidelines for a New Growth Management Law

The Planning Directors believe that a new growth management law is vitally needed. The new law should convey what the people of the state want Washington's future to be. It should also ensure that state, regional, and local governments act to achieve that desired future.

We recommend that a new growth management law incorporate the following nine points:

1. Establish a statewide vision of the future.

This vision should be created through extensive public involvement, recognizing the powerful populist tradition and regional diversity of the state. This vision should include issues of interest to all citizens of the state.

2. Set goals, policies, and as appropriate, minimum standards for issues of statewide significance.

Issues of state-wide significance include the eight listed on page 2. Where appropriate, the state should follow the precedent of the Shoreline Master Program in setting standards for local compliance.

3. Require that state, regional, and local plans be consistent with adopted state goals, policies, and standards, and make sure those plans are mutually consistent.

State plans should make clear what is expected from local government: e.g., specific policies and standards for addressing those issues of importance statewide. Regional and local land use plans should include public facility standards and be supported by infrastructure plans and funding strategies.

4. Require that regulations and capital budgets of state agencies, regional and local governments be consistent with adopted state, regional, and local plans.

By requiring decision makers at various levels to "follow the adopted blueprints," we reap the benefits of economies of scale and efficiencies of coordinated development approvals and infrastructure improvements. Without such a requirement, we remove an important incentive for jurisdictions to do comprehensive planning and dissipate the cumulative impact of joint actions.

5. Recognize that regional issues should be resolved regionally (e.g., water quality, transportation) and local issues should be resolved locally (e.g., subdivision standards, most siting issues).

Recognizing that some regions now have workable structures, each region should have the option of defining the logical planning region, and should decide on the appropriate type of regional governance.





Each region should decide whether to use current government structure or establish a new agency.

6. Establish in state law that public facilities must be synchronized with growth. Needed facilities should be available, or a financial commitment secured, prior to development permit approval.

The concept of “concurrency” is one of the hallmarks of Florida’s growth management system. It says that communities should “pay as they grow” for new infrastructure and require that service levels not unreasonably suffer as a consequence of new development.

7. Provide carrots as well as sticks to assure compliance with state goals, policies, and standards.

“Carrots” to compel compliance should include local option taxes or other revenue enhancements, while “sticks” should include the loss of the authority to render a certain decision at the lower level. For example, if a local government did not prepare an adequate plan by a date certain, the regional entity could assume that responsibility; if the regional entity did not prepare an adequate plan by a date certain, the state could assume that responsibility.

8. Recognize that certain local government decisions need to be made collectively at a regional level, or at a statewide level in order to achieve regional and statewide goals.

Home rule and local control are deeply seated values in Washington State. Unfortunately, when every locality exercises absolute local control, it results in a defacto veto of needed regional facilities.

9. Include an appeals process, and provide for conflict resolution at the local, regional, and state level.

The present system for dispute resolution, particularly in land use and governance, relies too heavily on the judicial system. A new streamlined process should be created which still affords due process but encourages collaborative development of plans among governments and expedites implementation of adopted policies.



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