

## **Buildable Lands and the GMA Requirement**

“Buildable Lands,” as it applies to requirements in the Growth Management Act (GMA), is often misunderstood. A discussion below summarizes the purposes and required steps for the Buildable Lands Program and notes that the current methodology being used by Snohomish County Tomorrow credibly meets the evaluation requirements.

### What is the purpose of the Buildable Lands Program?

The primary purposes of the Buildable Lands Program, as described in RCW 36.70A.215, are to:

1. Determine whether a county and its cities are achieving urban densities within UGAs by comparing growth and development assumptions, targets, and objectives with actual growth and development that has occurred in the county and cities.
2. Identify reasonable measures, other than expanding UGAs, that will be taken to comply with the GMA.

### What are the steps that the Buildable Lands Program requires under the GMA?

- a) Data-gathering by cities and counties
- b) Evaluation of the data at five-year intervals (2002, 2007, etc.) to determine whether the data show inconsistencies in how growth and development occurred, compared to what was envisioned in the local comprehensive plans and county-wide policies
- c) Report at five-year intervals (starting with September 1, 2002) to summarize the above evaluation
- d) Consideration by each jurisdiction of what “reasonable measures” to take, if necessary, to increase the consistency between plans and development over the next 5-year period
- e) Adoption, as necessary, of reasonable measures by jurisdictions
- f) Monitoring of reasonable measures taken
- g) Adjustments if those reasonable measures are not effective
- h) Continuation of Review & Evaluation cycle.

### How does the SCT process fit the requirements of the “Evaluation Step?”

The evaluation step includes identifying what land is buildable (i.e., “suitable for development”) and what development has occurred over the last five years. The state’s “Buildable Lands Guidelines” (page 11) defines buildable lands and the Snohomish County Tomorrow methodology follows that definition. The definition excludes certain kinds of land, such as public lands and environmentally critical areas where development is unfeasible.

In addition, the county-wide methodology uses:

- Standard factors, based on historical experience, for how much development is likely to occur on various types of land (vacant, partially used, etc.)
- Market factor (in addition to previous factors) of 25%.

Such standardized factors help provide a fairly conservative, yet credible estimate of the net buildable land supply.

How do population forecasts fit into the evaluation?

The Buildable Lands statute requires that, by the evaluation deadline (September 1, 2002 and every five years thereafter), that cities and counties use the most recent *population allocations that have been established between each county and city, pursuant to GMA requirements*. For the 2002 evaluation, that means the population allocations that were based on the 2012 forecast from state Office of Financial Management. For later evaluations, a new county-wide population allocation, based on the 2025 forecast will have been established and those figures must then be used.

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