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# Washington's GMA – Urban Growth Boundaries

Columbia River Gorge Commission  
Urban Boundary Workshop  
August 21, 2018

# 14 GMA Goals

RCW 36.70A.020

- **Encourage compact urban growth**
- **Reduce sprawl**
- **Encourage coordinated, multimodal transportation**
- Encourage affordable housing
- Encourage economic development
- Protect property rights
- Predictable permitting
- **Maintain natural resource industries**
- **Retain open space, enhance recreation**
- **Protect the environment**
- Encourage citizen participation
- **Ensure availability of public facilities and services**
- Encourage historic preservation
- Manage shoreline development



# WHY UGAs?

## Primary Tool to Realize GMA Goals

- Encourage development in urban areas where **adequate** public facilities exist or can be provided efficiently.
- Reduce inappropriate conversion of undeveloped land into sprawling low-density development





# Counties Legislatively Responsible for UGAs



- A collaborative process
- Population projections & allocations
- Designate sufficient land for 20 years
- Is supported by financially realistic plans to provide adequate public facilities



# Countywide Planning Policies

- Guides development of Comprehensive Plans
- Consistency between cities and county
- Developed Collaboratively
- Multicounty Policies (RCW 36.70A.210)(7)
  - King
  - Pierce
  - Snohomish



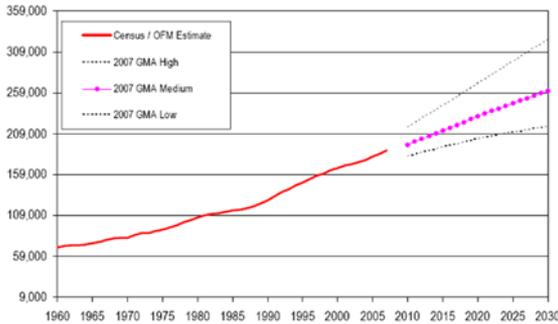
# Growth Strategies



- Variety of approaches
- Coordination is key
- Consider factors which could limit growth (water availability, infrastructure, etc.)
- Review urban and rural growth patterns & ensure consistency with the GMA



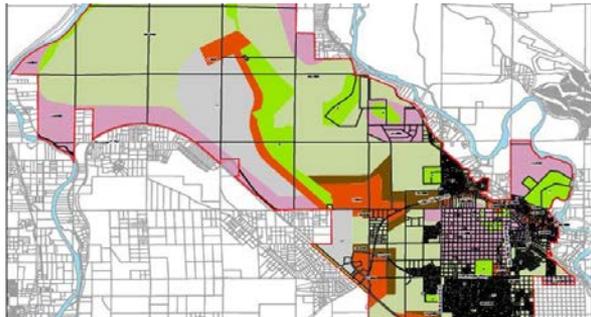
# Where is the UGA Boundary?



*Growth Forecast*



*Capital Facilities*



*Land Capacity*



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# Designating UGAs

## Where is Urban Growth Located?

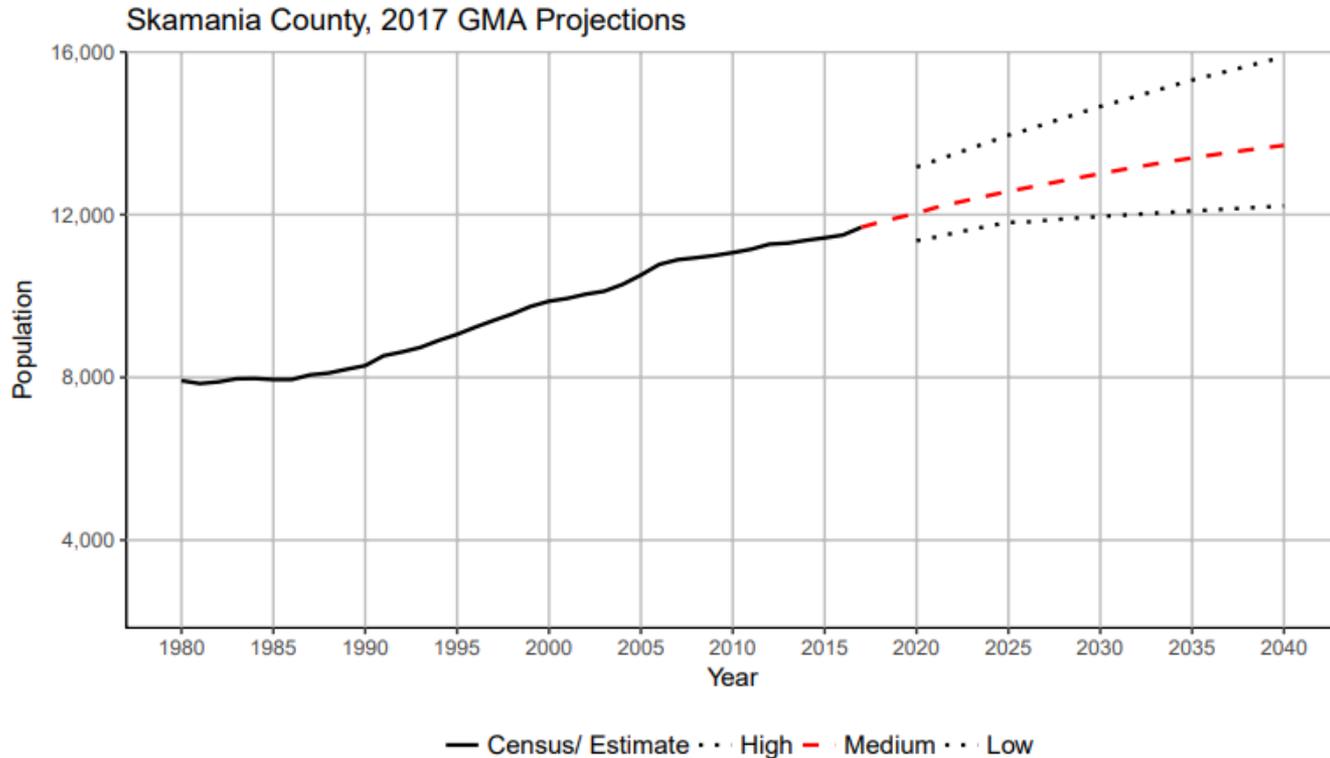
1. Areas already characterized by urban growth with adequate existing public facilities
2. Areas already characterized by urban growth that will be served adequately by a combination of both **existing** public facilities and services and any **additional** needed public facilities and services that are provided by either public or private sources, and
3. Remaining portions of the urban growth areas. Also in designated new fully contained communities as defined by RCW 36.70A.350.

RCW 36.70A.110(3)



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# OFM Population Projections



OFM Forecasting & Research Division | December 2017



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# OFM Population Projections: Use the Middle Range as a Starting Point

## RCW 43.62.035:

“The middle range shall represent the office's estimate of the most likely population projection for the county. If any city or county believes that a projection will not accurately reflect actual population growth in a county, it may petition the office to revise the projection accordingly.”

### *Know the basics:*

- OFM develops projections every 5 years.
- The middle range is OFM’s estimate of the likely population for the county.
- There is a process to coordinate with OFM before they finalize the numbers if you believe the projections are inaccurate.



# Capital Facilities Requirements



- Inventory of existing facilities.
- Forecast of future needs.
- Adopted levels of service standards.
- Proposed location and capacity of facilities.
- Financing plan.
- Reassessment, if funding falls short.



# Capital Facilities and Transportation: Six and Twenty Year Plans

GMA – Goal 12  
(RCW 36.70A.020)

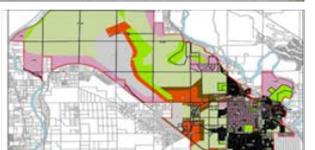
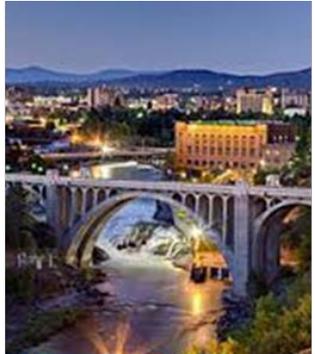
Ensure that those public facilities and services necessary to support development shall be adequate to serve the development at the time the development is available for occupancy and use without decreasing current service levels below locally established minimum standards.

- A capital facilities element should address how the necessary public facilities and services will be provided and funded for the entire planning horizon.
- Compliance with GMA Goal 12.
- Serves as a check on UGA expansions, and encourages fiscally responsible decisions.



# Land Capacity Analysis: Assumptions

- Vacant Parcel Acreage
- Partially vacant – at least 2 times the min. lot size
- Percentage of land likely needed for public purposes
- Average household size
- Redevelopment potential and improvement to land values
- Commercial and industrial employment density



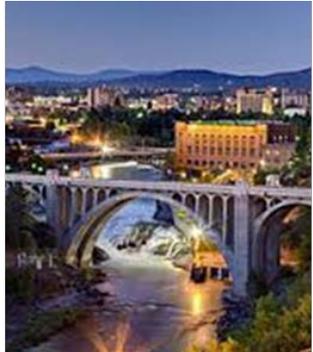
# Land Capacity Analysis: Deductions and Market Factor

## *Common deductions include:*

- Undevelopable land (including parks, schools, churches, and public facilities)
- Lands constrained by critical areas
- Reasonable market factor

## *Considerations for the market factor:*

- Document how you arrived at your market factor
- Determine if UGAs merit different market factors based on a local analysis





# Environmental Assessment:

## Reviewing the impacts of growth strategies and future development



### State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA):

- Non-project Review
- Determine if you need to conduct a new EIS or supplement an existing FEIS
- Start as early in the process as possible when there is enough information to review the impacts



# Common Challenges Facing Local Governments

- Overly ambitious population projections
- UGA boundaries with excessive capacity
- Pressure from community stakeholders (school districts, developers, property owners)
- Inadequate capital facility analyses



# State Role in GMA

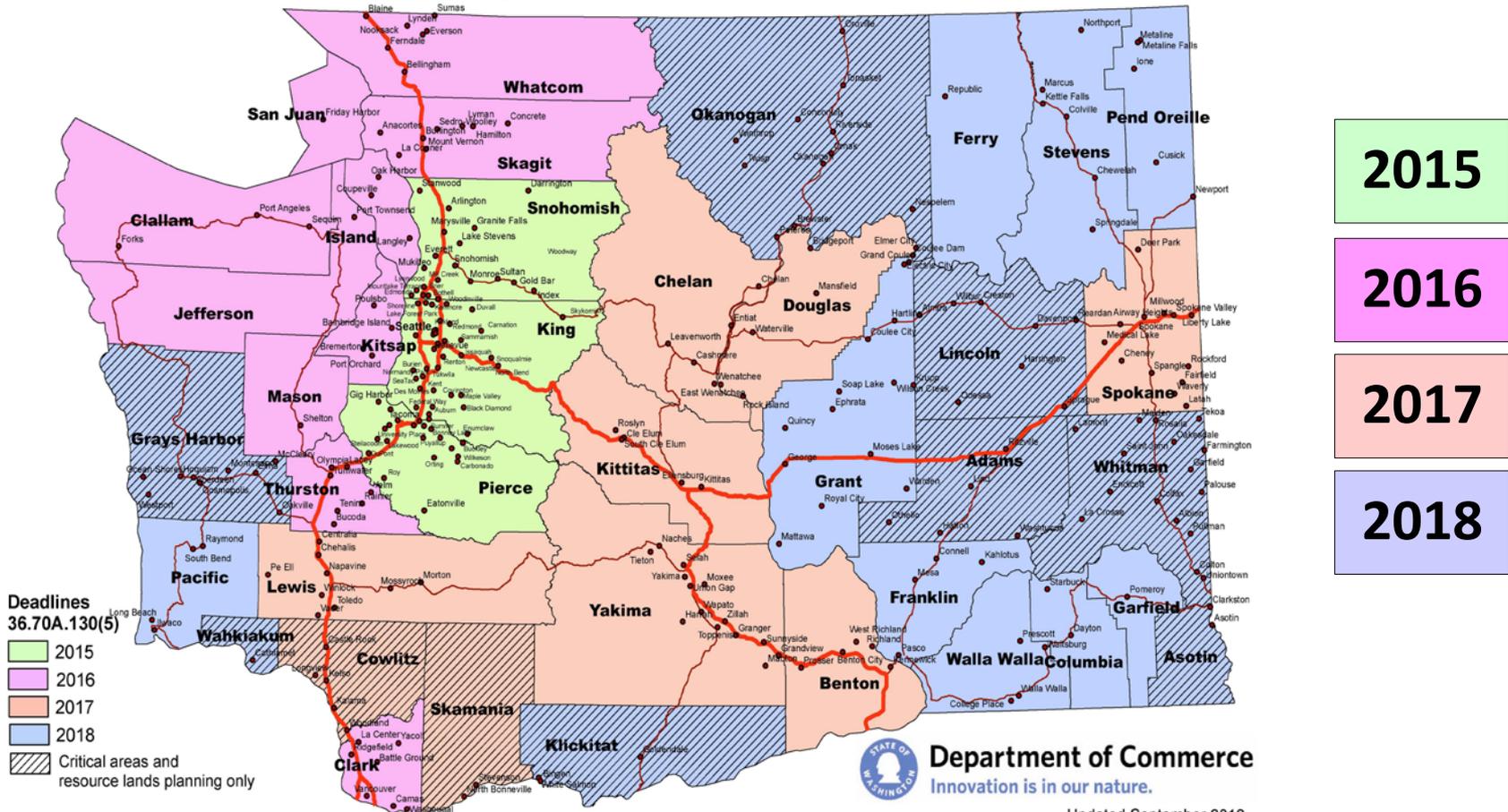
- Commerce provides technical support
- Planning Grants
- 60-day review for Comp Plans and Development Regs
- Review and comment on draft amendments
- Agency may appeal with Governor's approval



# GMA Periodic Update Deadlines

Eight year cycle

GMA Update Schedule: RCW 36.70A.130(5)



# Grant and Loan Programs Requiring Update Completion



- Public Works Trust Fund
- Drinking Water State Revolving Fund
- Centennial Clean Water Fund
- Recreation and Conservation Office
- Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grants



# UGA Decisions After 25 Years of GMA: Growth Management Hearings Board & Court Decisions

## *Thurston County V. WWGMHB and 1000 Friends of WA (No. 80115-1) 2008*

- **A county is subject to challenge if the OFM population projection has changed when they conduct a periodic review.**
- **A UGA designation cannot exceed the amount of land necessary to accommodate projected urban growth, plus a reasonable land market supply factor.**



# UGA Decisions After 25 Years of GMA: Growth Management Hearings Board & Court Decisions

## *Diehl V. Mason County (No. 22540-9-II) 1999*

- Stay within the OFM projection range.
- A jurisdiction must explain why a market factor is required and how it was reached.
- Population projections used by the cities and counties must be consistent.

**“If a County could enlarge UGAs to accommodate any population maximum it chose, then the result would likely be the urban sprawl the GMA is trying to avoid.”**



# UGA Decisions After 25 Years of GMA: Growth Management Hearings Board & Court Decisions

*Thurston County V. WWGMHB and 1000 Friends of WA (No. 80115-1) 2008*

**“Oversized UGAs are perhaps the most egregious affront to the fundamental GMA policy against urban sprawl, and it is this policy that the UGA requirements, more than any other substantive GMA mandate, are intended to further.”**

-Washington State Supreme Court (quoting Brent D. Lloyd)



# UGA Decisions After 25 Years of GMA: Growth Management Hearings Board & Court Decisions

## *City of Oak Harbor v. Island County (Case No. 11-2-0005) 2011*

- The GMHB expects you to show your work.
- The legislative body of the county has the final authority in UGA sizing decisions and is not required to defer to a city.
- Coordination and communication is essential to an effective planning process.

**“...it is a county’s right and obligation to designate UGAs...the County needs ‘to show its work’ in developing its assumptions in order for a proper evaluation by the public and the Board as to whether or not the County’s action in delineating the UGA complies with the GMA.”**



# UGA Decisions After 25 Years of GMA: Growth Management Hearings Board & Court Decisions

## *Futurewise v. Benton County (Case No. 14-1-0003) 2014*

- Expansion of a UGA is a regional consideration and must be based on projected population and employment growth.
- Ensure UGA amendments are consistent with the Countywide Planning Policies (ex: de-designation of agricultural activities).
- Provide 6 and 20 year financing plans for transportation capital facilities.

**“...desired economic opportunity does not trump GMA resource conservation criteria.”**





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The Department of Commerce GMS assists local governments in Washington State to implement the Growth Management Act (GMA) 36.70A RCW.

Comments or questions, please call or email:

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