

THE COSTLY MYTH OF THE WASHINGTON STATE GROWTH MANAGEMENT ACT

This country was built on individual freedom through a unique and beautifully framed bill of rights and constitution and the wide range of choices that freedom allows. As the eastern half of the U. S. became more crowded in the mid to late 1800's, people went out West to find more open space and more freedom. The west was truly the "freedom" frontier. There is no "West" to go to now, but there is plenty of land to inhabit, if government and the planners will open it up.

We first traveled by horse, coach, covered wagon and sometimes train. But individuals traveled mostly by foot or by horse. The horse represented our individual "freedom" of movement. Then the car was invented and it replaced the horse and it broadened our "freedom" of movement, exponentially. There was hardly a place we couldn't go, excepting over water of course, but we could build bridges and ferries for that. The government responded, appropriately, by building roads, freeways and bridges to expand on this freedom even more. And for many years in Washington State, we built bridges and roads and freeways to accommodate that most treasured of all human freedoms, the car. In the 1960's, Forward Thrust visionaries had already planned and funded freeway arteries to cover the growth they knew was coming to the Puget Sound region. But those projects were killed by a few lawyers and property owners. They can never be built now.

Sure there are problems with the car. It pollutes the air and if there are not enough roads, it creates congestion and gridlock. However, these problems are resolvable over time by technology and the expenditure of government funds to create more roads together with common-sense land use policies.

But instead of attempting to resolve the problems, the land planners have gotten together over the last 25 years or so and have decided who, where, how and why people should live. The Growth Management Act (GMA) is merely an extension of this overall government/land planner sponsored philosophy. In so doing the GMA ignores human behavior by trying to strip the "freedom" of movement from us. By telling us we have to live closer together. By raising regulation to almost a galactic level and in so doing, raising the cost of single-family housing astronomically, removing forever the choice of detached home ownership, except for the wealthy. In demanding higher densities, the planners have increased air and noise pollution, congestion, crime and most importantly, the lack of security. Our large-lot, single-family neighborhoods became synonymous with peace of mind and security. (*i.e. Low crime, low noise, low air pollution and safe.*)

This flawed policy does not take into account the following negative effects:

- 1) Increased traffic and utility use within the Urban Growth Boundaries beyond capacity, as I just mentioned about Issaquah.
- 2) Increased pollution (*noise, air and water*);
- 3) Increased crime;
- 4) Loss of revenue, time and wasted fuel;
- 5) Increasing property values and taxes due to high demand and limited supply;
- 6) The social cost due to human behavioral changes such as anger and frustration, resulting from higher densities, overcrowding and congestion;
- 7) It is a well known fact that higher densities and overcrowding precipitate urban decay;
- 8) The Act forces people to live in neat, compact, high density boxes and removes the freedom of choice.
- 9) The Act assumes that there is still developable land within the urban growth boundaries, but most of the land falls into wetlands or steep slopes as most of the good developable land has already been built on.

FLAWS IN GROWTH MANAGEMENT ACT

(Continued)

- 10) High density urban centers are extremely vulnerable to large loss of life and property damage in the event of war, like we just experienced on 9/11 and to natural disaster events such as plagues, floods, earthquakes, fire storms, tornadoes and hurricanes.
- 11) The Act increases development costs due to over-regulation and community opposition; and finally and most egregiously,
- 12) The unconstitutional disenfranchisement of rural landowners due to “sprawl” regulations by large population centers. Large population centers assume they have the “right” to preserve privately held rural lands as if those centers owned the land.

All of these negative effects far outweigh the cost of providing additional services to the “sprawl” areas. What ends up happening is that the “urban” areas vigorously resist the new growth thrust upon them for many of these reasons.

Growth management ignores all of these conditions and instead, exacerbates them. In short, we need to open up more of our land to development. We need to build more roads and infrastructure outside the urban and suburban areas. We need to increase lot sizes in those areas. We need to stop building in already high-density areas for the sanctity and security of those existing neighborhoods and to stop the increase in all of the bad things that “high density” brings. Cluster housing and high-density planned unit developments are a travesty as they just repeat what the planners have already allowed to happen by flawed land use policies and government-funded public housing projects. They are also a bad use of land by taking open space off of the tax rolls, removing a taxing source for government.

The real myth is that “Urban Sprawl” is bad. Urban sprawl created safe, affordable, non-congested neighborhoods with the freedom of “space”. The other myth, a reality that the GMA ignores, is that people behave well in congested neighborhoods. One only need look at the decay in our inner cities all across the country to dispel this myth, the direct result of high density.

Once a basic freedom has been established, taking it a way is not an option. But that is precisely what your government is doing to you through the GMA. It severely restricts reasonable choices and freedoms. It increases densities dramatically and increases the dollar and human costs for all of it. It ignores unchangeable human behavior as it relates to the freedom of movement. It locks up perfectly good, relatively inexpensive, developable land. It allows a board of three appointed (*not elected*) people to oversee land use decisions for the entire state. Cities and Counties pay a huge cost (*our taxes*) to comply with the Act. Humans occupy about 5% of the landmass of the United States. You'd think over the next 100 years we could increase that to 10%, without vastly undoing the environment.

The GMA has become a typical government “public works” project with inexcusable cost overruns and just plain bad policy. In short, the Act should be repealed and we should return to local-land use control, immediately.

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