GROWTH MANAGEMENT TOMORROW:
TOWARD A PROSPEROUS FUTURE

May 18 - 20, 2005

Sleeping Lady Mountain Resort
Leavenworth, Washington

Northwest Assembly
University of Washington
PREFACE

On May 18th, 2005, thirty-nine men and women, including public- and private-sector leaders in planning, public policy, environmental management, real estate, law, academia, housing, and economic development gathered at Sleeping Lady Mountain Resort in Leavenworth, Washington for the first Northwest Assembly entitled, “Growth Management Tomorrow: Toward a Prosperous Future.” During the Assembly, this group considered six major, interrelated questions with regard to growth management generally, and portions of Washington State’s Growth Management Act in particular. In the course of the conversations, the professionals reviewed the historical context of the Act, described its current state, strengths and weaknesses, potential areas for policy improvement, and tools by which the Act could be better implemented.

This Assembly project was organized by the Northwest Center for Livable Communities at the University of Washington. It benefited from the assistance and advice of a distinguished steering committee, whose names and affiliations are presented in this report.
In preparation for this meeting, background materials were compiled at the University of Washington. These materials included reports, articles, and papers by the Washington Chapter of the American Planning Association; Joe Tovar, FAICP, former member of the Puget Sound Region Growth Management Hearings Board; Tim Trohimovich, AICP, Planning Director of Futurewise (formerly 1,000 Friends of Washington); and Perkins Coie, LLP.

During the Assembly participants heard addresses from Joe King, former Washington legislator and House Speaker; Mike McCormick, FAICP, and former assistant director for the Department of Community Development; Mary Place, former Mayor and current city councilor of Yakima, Washington and President of the Association of Washington Cities; Juli Wilkerson, Director of the Washington State Department of Community Trade and Economic Development. At the conclusion of the Assembly, participants reviewed and amended a draft of this report. This report is available on the Northwest Center for Livable Communities’ web site (www.Washington.edu/nwclc). Visitors to the web site can also view some of the background material distributed to participants, and the discussion notes from the three discussion groups.

The Northwest Center for Livable Communities gratefully acknowledges the financial support from the Washington Association of Realtors, the Washington Chapter of the American Planning Association and the Washington State Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED), Department of Transportation (WSDOT), Department of Ecology (DOE), the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Region X
for this important regional initiative. The meeting was co-sponsored by the American Assembly at Columbia University. The Northwest Center takes no position on the topics presented for discussion here and in the Assembly. In addition, participants in the Assembly spoke for themselves, and not necessarily for the organizations and institutions with which they are affiliated.

FOREWORD

The accommodation and management of urban and regional growth and development have been challenges for policy makers and citizens alike for decades. Particularly acute in some areas of the country and regions in individual states, growth both allows for and threatens the quality of life that we as a nation have come to expect. A federal system of fifty states allows for the development of policy in fifty different crucibles, each sensitive to its own regional context. The Pacific Northwest is blessed with environmental amenities, natural resources, and scenic beauty that are unparalleled in the United States. Two of the strongest state-based growth management acts emerged from the Pacific Northwest, with Oregon’s Senate Bill 100 of 1972 and Washington’s similar effort in 1990. The challenges of accommodating growth in urban areas, and the recent passage of Oregon’s Measure 37 are but two examples of the challenges that must be addressed if Washington’s growth management efforts are to mature.

To effectively address the complex challenge of growth in our state, a wide variety of voices needs to be heard, through a collaborative process of policy refinement, strategy development, and implementation. It is under this banner that this Assembly met.
While the Northwest Center for Livable Communities takes no position on the topics or recommendations presented herein, it is nonetheless proud to have convened and enabled this important work. The Assembly recognizes the significant commitment of time and energy that the participants have made, and commends them for the creative production of ideas and thoughts on this timely issue. The Assembly and the Northwest Center for Livable Communities hope this report will be utilized as input to the important public deliberations that form the core of our democratic society, and will ultimately have influence in the shaping of subsequent public policy.
At the close of their discussions, the participants in the Northwest Assembly, Growth Management Tomorrow: Toward a Prosperous Future, at Sleeping Lady Mountain Resort, Leavenworth, Washington, May 18-20, 2005, reviewed as a group the following statement. This statement represents general agreement; however, no one was asked to sign it, nor did everyone agree with all of it.

Introduction

Seeking to stem the tide of consequences of outward sprawling development, the Washington State legislature passed the Growth Management Act (GMA) in 1990. The GMA established 13 (which were later expanded to include 14) broad goals and associated requirements obligating many jurisdictions in the state to develop and implement plans for their growth. Its purpose remains to enable the state to grow gracefully and sustainably.

The GMA has in many ways been successful, and numerous legislative refinements have been made in its 15-year history. Adjustments in light of experience may be necessary to address current needs and head off future challenges. As an example of the challenges the Act faces, consider that while some communities are challenged to accommodate a rapidly growing population that, at times, overwhelms resources and infrastructure, others struggle to develop diversified employment and sustainable economies in the face of low or modest population growth. Some cities and counties may not be adopting
densities necessary to achieve their projected growth. Furthermore, the state lacks a means of measuring and assessing the performance of the legislation relative to its policy goals. Environmental, real estate, smart growth, and citizen groups have all made policy reform recommendations and proposed action plans for improvement on the progress toward these goals.

Broad, consensus-based approaches continue to be needed to improve the GMA, and its implementation remains to be made. The initial drafting of the Act in 1990 resulted from a focused, dedicated effort that sought a wide constituency for support, and acted at an opportune historic moment. Similarly, strategies for achieving sustainable growth depend on a similar assemblage of interested parties, including both public and private sectors.

By assembling a group of public officials, local government representatives, advisory group representatives, academics, and private sector leaders, the Northwest Center for Livable Communities convened a cross-section of stakeholder groups for directed, objective discussion in a neutral setting. The participants were divided into three groups and each group discussed six issue areas or questions. The Assembly thus provides a forum for more comprehensive and interdisciplinary discussions for describing, analyzing, and assessing the GMA, and positing recommendations to better achieve its goals.

**Discussion of the Major Themes**

Over a two-day period, the three groups addressed the following six topic areas:
accommodating growth

housing

the jobs-housing balance, and associated transportation needs

provision of public facilities and services/infrastructure funding

private property rights and community interests

balancing rural growth and conservation of resource lands

Discussion of each topic was facilitated, and the groups were prompted with an identical list of questions in each topic area. What follows is a distillation and explanation of the major issues that the groups collectively identified. They have been consolidated into four thematic areas: Housing and the Jobs-Housing Mix, Infrastructure and Public Facilities, Private Property Rights and Community Interests, and Balancing Rural Growth and Natural Resource Land Conservation. Also presented is a set of unifying themes that connect them or ran through the overall discussion.

**Unifying Themes: Conclusions and Recommendations**

The following themes are in some cases descriptive, in others prescriptive; many naturally suggest general recommendations for policy improvement as well. They are not presented in order of priority. Additional details with regard to specific policy tools, ideas, and concerns that came from the three discussion groups can be found on the web site of the Northwest Center (www.washington.edu/nwclc).
The Growth Management Act provides benefits and opportunities, and poses significant challenges. While there has been a lot of data collected at the local level, there is no systematic statewide data gathering and analysis to track achievement of its goals, except significant observational and anecdotal information. Participants thought that the GMA, to varying degrees, is achieving its goals. It might be enhanced in some areas, but these changes are refinements and improvements to the legislation. Such changes are reflected in the following points.

There is a need to clarify and further define the state role in GMA. The state has historically avoided such involvement in the interest of local control, and that is an effective strategy for the most part. However, on some issues it was generally agreed that the state should take a more defined role. There are at least two important reasons for this: it sets standards for statewide consistency on matters of statewide significance, and it can provide greater clarity for local government officials.

There is a need to better identify and address the regional effects of local actions. The issues that GMA addresses cross jurisdictional boundaries, and solutions need to be scaled to the level of the problems they are designed to solve. Some will require regional decision making and implementation. The call for broader and more effective efficient decision making to address the regional effects of local actions was specifically not a call for more government, but rather one for more integrated, coordinated action between government entities that currently exist.
Planning should attempt to create sustainable and vibrant communities. Our communities need to support a wide range of human needs and services as they also support healthy environments. This drives at quality of life considerations, as well as efficiency of service provision and public investment. Sustainable communities rely upon a balance between the competing needs of housing, jobs, transportation options, schools, public health, open space and recreational opportunities, as well as a litany of physical infrastructure such as water and sewer, gas and electric utilities, telecommunications, and air/port facilities.

There is a need to increase regulatory efficiency and fairness. Across each topic, participants shared examples of regulatory inefficiencies that led to unintended negative consequences. From barriers to providing affordable housing and a more adequate housing stock inventory, to land restrictions that make it difficult to maintain viable agricultural lands, to developing tools for more fair application of regulations across residents of the state to avoid perceived and real inequities with regard to property rights and uses, there are a multitude of ways to enhance regulatory efficiency. In some cases this might also lead to financial gains from increased efficiency, but that would be a secondary benefit to the enhanced functioning of government.

There is a need for more data and measurement of trends associated with growth. In 1990 when the GMA was passed, it was decided that all resources allotted for growth management go to front-line implementation of the Act, and that the development of measurement tools or indicators of progress toward the goals of the Act would be
strategically deferred. Fifteen years later the need for measurement to assess the degree of achievement of the Act’s goals is clear. This collection of measurement data should assist local government, and not result in an undue burden that would distract it from working to implement the GMA. Additionally, information about demographic, jobs, housing market, and transportation trends needs to be included more specifically in planning. This corresponds with the fourth theme, that of planning for sustainable and vibrant communities.

**Feedback and evaluation mechanisms are essential.** Following the sixth theme, the call for specific and measurable data for analysis, tracking trends, and policy reform, comes the need for mechanisms to institutionalize that reform process. There needs to be an iterative approach to evaluation and course correction, otherwise there is a risk of continuing policy measures that do not work or missing the opportunity to enact better ones.

**It is important for the State to recognize regional differences—“one size does not fit all,”—nurture flexible approaches and innovation, and honor the deference to local processes and decision making.** Washington took a bottom-up approach in the creation of the GMA, attempting to avoid a centralized planning model and be responsive to the regional variations in the state. The three Growth Management Hearings Boards were developed in response to this concern, and not all jurisdictions were, or are, required to plan under the Act. There is an ongoing need for balancing consistency with sensitivity to regional differences and allowance for innovative approaches to local problem
solving. More sophisticated planning mechanisms are needed in the more rapidly growing jurisdictions. Furthermore, local problem-solving approaches should occur within the framework of GMA goals and statewide significance discussed in the second theme.

There needs to be increased and ongoing public awareness and engagement in growth issues. This theme speaks to the benefit of an informed and engaged public and the power of dialogue in issue identification and subsequent problem solving. Increased public knowledge of the economics of housing markets, local agricultural practices, or resource-based development limitations, would provide opportunity to engage citizens in discussions about growth, growth accommodation, and growth management. Not only would this enhance public policy through participatory democratic practices, it would build the constituency for such democratically-derived policies.

Funding for planning and projects is critically limited. There were a number of creative, regional or local-scale taxation options discussed in the groups. The limited and decreasing amounts of federal and state aid for infrastructure (much less planning) projects was recognized as acute. The enormity and complexity of funding challenges was clearly recognized by participants. We would be remiss if we failed to mention the need for multiple levels of review, from state to local, though, simply because of the complexity of the task. Changes to infrastructure funding policies should include provision to tie state and regional funding to local growth policies, and provide local governments with more local funding options. Examples of the types discussed include
tax increment financing, extension of local improvement districts, as well as linking infrastructure funding to growth. More ideas can be found in the individual group notes.

**Housing, and the Jobs-Housing Mix**

This includes two of the conversation topics, as housing and the jobs-housing balance were separated for discussion purposes. However, the themes that came from both sections were so congruent that they deserved to be combined under a single heading. The themes range from scale of problem identification and analysis to regional and site-specific design, and have close linkages to the unifying themes presented above. All the themes for this section will be presented, with discussion following, as they are very closely related.

*Access to living wage jobs is a critically important “affordable housing” strategy for providing housing opportunities throughout the state.*

*There should be awareness of regional consequences associated with planning for housing and the housing-jobs balance; this regional perspective might require accountability and oversight.*

*There needs to be better coordination of planning for jobs, housing, and the wide variety of necessary infrastructure needed in our communities.*

*There needs to be more, and more readily available data and associated public education on housing, demographic, and market trends.*

*Design considerations are important for achieving objectives of localized density, aesthetic appeal, and efficient multi-modal regional transportation.*

*It is unreasonable to expect either the GMA or the market mechanism alone to provide affordable housing (80% of median income standard)—incentives and regulatory reform are necessary to encourage the creation of more housing, and more diverse housing stock.*
There is a clear shortage of housing inventory in some areas of the state—notably in the Puget Sound region—regardless of the reasons. Some counties and their cities are not realizing enough housing based on their job growth, regardless of their previously projected needs. With this supply shortage, housing prices have increased to levels that force moderate and lower-wage workers to move to areas of more affordable housing. Without a regional perspective on housing, with included local accountability, it will be impossible to stem this tide. Ultimately, state oversight may be required to hold counties and their cities accountable to necessary targets for housing.

Comprehensive planning must be based on projections that are both numeric and accurate. When actual growth exceeds projections, mid-course corrections should be implemented using an iterative feedback mechanism. To support this integrated jobs-housing planning, data and analysis tools will be required, including directly linking employment growth and OFM population forecasts in an integrated, consistent forecasting model.

Participants noted on several occasions the importance of good design—in terms of both form and function. Design allows for high-quality communities with densities appropriate to achieve overall planning and multi-modal transportation goals as well as housing targets. As public health is an increasingly important component of healthy communities, designing communities for active lifestyles will grow in importance. We should be examining the implications of this type of community on land use planning and growth management.

Finally, while markets and effective and appropriate institutional structures can help meet the housing needs of the state’s population,
it is unrealistic to expect them to provide affordable housing for those making less than 50 percent of local median incomes. Producing housing stock at this level can’t be financed by the market alone, and requires commitment of public resources and innovative solutions such as public-private partnerships. Financial incentives, broadly speaking, are a possible response and include options such as enhanced opportunities for developers who pay into an affordable housing fund, regional revenue-sharing-type models for affordable housing, and regional cooperation in assessing needs and identifying how and where those needs will be met.

**Infrastructure and Public Facilities**

Infrastructure and public facilities was the fourth topic of six in the course of the meetings. As the discussions developed there was extensive overlap in themes and suggestions across groups and across topics. This is not overly surprising due to the integrated nature of the land use and planning areas involved in growth generally, and the GMA specifically. The themes that came out of these meetings include the following three.

*There is a shortage of federal, state, and local funds.*

*Planning for infrastructure and public facilities needs to be integrated across numerous types of facilities, and needs to be considered at the regional scale.*

*State public investment requires an investment strategy, prioritization, and opportunities for efficiencies should be sought—and funding processes should be coordinated across funding agencies (RTPOs, PWAA, TIB, WSDOT, DOE, DOH, etc.), in accordance with the statewide investment strategy.*
We face a challenge in funding infrastructure upgrades in already-developed areas. This issue needs to be addressed in addition to mitigating impacts of new development.

The funding crisis for infrastructure and public facilities was widely recognized. Managing to meet infrastructural needs in such an atmosphere requires smart fiscal management, and directed public investment to accommodate and manage growth as appropriate in different regions.

Private Property Rights and Community Interests

Private property rights continue to be a highly sensitive topic in land use planning and community development. The concepts of fairness and clarity, as well as the recognition of the importance of the issue and sensitivity to local context, resonate through the themes from these group discussions.

The rights of property owners are an issue in Washington. Government needs to be prepared to address property rights concerns and potential property-rights based initiatives.

There needs to be an increase in public understanding about private property rights and the regulatory environment, and the limitations of each.

There is a need for sensitivity in handling private property rights conflicts, and a recognition of the importance of flexible approaches, recognizing and addressing existing uses, and clearly identifying and communicating “compelling public interests.”

Solutions should be non-regulatory when possible.

There must be emphasis on clarity, fairness, and consistency.
Without question, communities and government officials at every level need to be well versed in the language of property rights and the community interests and values that surround land use and community development, because these challenges are soon to arrive on our collective doorsteps.

**Balancing Rural Growth and Natural Resource Land Conservation**

The conversations in the groups on this topic revolved around resource constraints to development, including water shortages and future aggregate shortages for road construction, as well as identifying appropriate industries—along with size, scale, and intensity of usage—for rural areas. The unifying theme for this topic is the first.

*Encourage rural landscapes by supporting opportunities for diverse and sustainable rural communities, identifying and targeting for development those industries and economic uses that are complementary to, and successful in, rural areas.*

*Recognize development limits with regard to key natural resources.*

*Make resource assessments from a regional perspective (e.g. watershed), and address balancing high and low quality and high and low value; then manage areas accordingly. All resources are not the same—be sensitive to regional context when making decisions.*
CONCLUSION

The recommendations presented in this report are not revolutionary; many of them are not new at all. The process used to get to them, however, and the vast experience of the participants should make them stand out and demonstrates the report’s value. Growth accommodation and management, and the Growth Management Act, are important to maintaining the high quality of life found in Washington. There is reason to be optimistic, as the Act puts Washington at the forefront of state-based policy to protect the values of Washington’s citizens, while promoting diverse and sustainable urban and rural communities. However, it comes with its own set of challenges, including balancing individual property rights with community needs, streamlining a complex regulatory environment, and improving regional coordination.

The process by which these recommendations was reached is notable and indicative of the type of process that needs to be undertaken on a larger scale to increase public engagement in growth issues in Washington. With one million people coming here every twelve years there is just no doubt the state needs to be prepared to accommodate growth.
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BACKGROUND: STATUS OF GMA

Seeking to stem the tide of consequences of outward sprawling development, the Washington State Legislature passed the Growth Management Act in 1990. The GMA established 14 broad goals, ranging from reducing sprawl and providing affordable housing, to shoreline management, and requiring growing communities to develop and implement plans for managing their growth. Its purpose remains to reduce the destructive impacts of unplanned growth and protect Washington’s quality of life, and begins by focusing growth in designated areas.

However, in some parts of the state new development continues outside of the GMA-mandated Urban Growth Areas, at a significant rate. For example, 38% of the new development permits in Pierce County, and 58% of the new development permits issued in Kitsap County, were for projects outside of the UGA in 2000.

Further, the state still lacks a means of measuring and assessing the performance of the legislation relative to the 14 goals of the GMA. Environmental, real estate, smart growth, and citizen groups have made policy reform recommendations and proposed action plans for improvement upon progress towards the GMA-stated objectives.

Yet, a large-scale, consensus-based approach to strengthening the GMA and its implementation remains to be made. The initial drafting and passage of the legislation in 1990 resulted from a localized and dedicated effort that actively sought a wide constituency for support. Likewise, re-evaluating, reforming, and bolstering the GMA depends
on a similar assemblage of a wide spectrum of social, political, economic, professional and vocational interests—both government and private.

By assembling a group of public officials, local government representatives, advisory group representatives, academics, and private sector leaders, the Northwest Assembly will be convening a cross section of stakeholder groups, in a neutral setting with directed, objective discussion. By dividing the assembled participants into groups and each group discussing six questions or issues, The Assembly provides a unique forum for a more comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach to discussing, analyzing, assessing, and positing recommendations for GMA reform. While individual groups have made many previous efforts at reform that are substantively rich and well supported, we suggest that the gap between them and reform may be the result of their many different sources, and lack of a broad-based constituency behind the various recommendations.

BACKGROUND: AMERICAN ASSEMBLY

The hallmark of the American Assembly and strength of consensus report resides in the unique conference technique it employs. First, the process brings together a unique group of important public opinion leaders across a wide spectrum of social, political, economic, professional and vocational interests, both public and private, in a neutral setting. Second, The Assembly is focused around a policy issue, and culminates in the production of a report with the consensus of the participants. These two essential characteristics distinguish the American Assembly approach from other meetings and conferences.
Founded in 1950 by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, the American Assembly is an affiliate organization of Columbia University, designed to focus attention and stimulate informed discussion on a range of critical U.S. policy issues. The unique conferences organized by the American Assembly, called “American Assemblies,” convene a diverse group of government officials, community and civic leaders, and key private sector decision makers in a neutral setting. A convening committee of key public opinion leaders identifies and invites the participants, and determines a set of questions surrounding the particular policy issue that The Assembly is being called to address. Conducted over three intensive days at the Arden House Estate, the participants are arranged in three groups and led in an informed discussion. On the final day, the three groups are brought together to produce a consensus report on the issue, which outlines policy areas to be addressed, initiatives to undertake, and identifies the appropriate agents responsible for the recommended courses of action. The impact of The Assembly’s deliberations on these key leaders is considerable, and has played a role in significant policy reform.
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Rodger Webster took on the tedious tasks of compiling the mailing list database and final distribution of the document. Throughout the accomplishment of those tasks he performed with his usual high standard of professionalism.

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