

**CHAPTER 1:
OVERVIEW**



Overview

Since the late 1970s the Thurston Regional Planning Council has provided estimates of the buildable land supply in Thurston County. This helps local governments ensure that an adequate land supply is available to accommodate projected growth. During this time Thurston County has been one of the fastest growing counties in Washington State. In the last 35 years, population grew by over 150,000 people, and over 85,000 new jobs were created in the County.

In 1990 the State Growth Management Act (GMA) was passed requiring local cities, towns and the County to develop detailed plans on how they planned to accommodate growth. These are called Comprehensive Plans. At the same time the seven cities and towns and Thurston County developed county-wide planning policies that laid out how Thurston County was to grow as a region. Under these policies, Thurston Regional Planning Council was formally asked to review land supply and planned densities to ensure that the urban areas were large enough to accommodate 20 years of projected growth.

The legislature added a monitoring and evaluation provision to the GMA in 1997. This provision is often referred to as the “Buildable Lands Program.” It affects six western Washington counties (Clark, King, Kitsap, Pierce, Snohomish, and Thurston) and the cities and towns within them. The Thurston Regional Planning Council was asked to develop the Buildable Lands Report for Thurston County, based on its long history of monitoring land supply. The first report was issued in 2002.

The Buildable Lands Program in Thurston County answers two key growth-related questions. The first is whether residential development in the urban growth areas is occurring at the densities envisioned in local comprehensive plans. The second is whether there is adequate land supply in the urban growth areas for anticipated future growth in population and employment.

The answers to these questions will help communities in our county determine if they are developing the way they want to.

Sources of Data

Annual Data Collection

- Residential and Commercial building permits from Bucoda, Lacey, Olympia, Rainier, Tenino, Tumwater, Thurston County, the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation, and the Nisqually Indian Tribe
- Approved subdivisions (long plats) from Thurston County Auditor's Office
- Residential projects in the development pipeline (application stages) from Bucoda, Lacey, Olympia, Rainier, Tenino, Tumwater, Thurston County, the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation, and the Nisqually Indian Tribe
- Population estimates for cities and towns from the State Office of Financial Management
- Thurston County Assessor's Office – building and land valuations
- Parcel GIS data layer from the Thurston Geodata Center
- Annexations

Other Sources of Data

- Covered Employment from the Washington State Office of Employment Securities
- Census 2000
- Aerial photography
- Zoning, jurisdiction boundaries, planning areas from local jurisdictions

Population and Employment Targets

- Population and Employment Forecast – Thurston Regional Planning Council

Related GMA Goals

GMA Goal (1) Urban growth. Encourage development in urban areas where adequate public facilities and services exist or can be provided in an efficient manner.

GMA Goal (2) Reduce sprawl. Reduce the inappropriate conversion of undeveloped land into sprawling, low-density development.

Related County-Wide Planning Policies

Urban growth within Thurston County will occur only in designated urban growth areas. The urban growth areas will be periodically reviewed.

Thurston County and each city and town will concentrate development in growth areas by: encouraging infill, phasing urban development outward from core areas, establishing mechanisms to ensure average residential densities are sufficient to accommodate the 20-year population projections, designate rural areas for low intensity, non-urban uses, requiring development to be configured so urban growth areas may eventually infill and become urban.

The State Office of Financial Management (OFM) growth management planning population projections will be used as the range of population to be accommodated for the coming 20 years.

Within the overall framework of the OFM population projections Thurston Regional Planning Council will develop county-wide and smaller area population projections based on current adopted plans, zoning and environmental regulations and buildout trends.

A review and evaluation program pursuant to RCW 36.70A.215 (“Buildable Lands Program”), will be established, subject to availability of state funding.