

2022 Task Force Topic Sheet

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Category: Integrating planning

Topic: Integrating water, sewer, school, and port districts into the Growth Management Act (GMA)

Topic Overview: Cities and counties are not the only service providers for capital facilities which are necessary to support growth. School districts, port districts, and water and sewer districts are often distinct from cities and counties. In many cases they have separate administrative structures and boundaries that cross multiple city and county boundaries. Prior reports and studies have pointed to the need to better integrate water, sewer, school, and port districts into planning under the GMA.

While the GMA requires cities and counties to coordinate with special district on the development of a [capital facilities plan](#), statutes governing special districts are not always designed to link with planning requirements cities and counties perform.

Problems this topic could address:

- **Confusion, conflict, competition:** A Road Map to Washington’s Future (Road Map I) noted that excluding special purpose districts from local government growth planning has spawned confusion, competition, and conflict among cities, counties, and special districts. Examples include when a special district makes a system funding commitment to serve a portion of a UGA, only for the county to then remove the area from the UGA.
- **Statute updates:** Some of the relevant sections of title [53 RCW](#) (port districts), for example, have not been updated to reflect the GMA and related statutes. Syncing these important statues up could increase coordination, especially as growth is planned for.

Preliminary recommendation options:

1. **Clarify GMA about role of special districts in incorporated cities and UGAs.** This includes potentially modifying RCW 36.70A.110 to require coordination with special purpose districts when proposing to add or remove land from Urban Growth Areas.
2. **Sync up GMA with statutes and administrative code governing utility district planning.** RCW 36.70A.070(3) specifies that local governments’ comprehensive plans under the GMA must include a capital facilities element that plans for capital facilities “owned by public entities,” which would include special districts. RCW 36.70A.100, Title 53 RCW (port districts), and Title 57 (water and sewer districts) could be modified to include that general comprehensive plans of special purpose districts shall be coordinated with and consistent with the comprehensive plans of the cities and counties under the capital facilities element.
3. **Link comprehensive planning for water and sewer districts with GMA planning where appropriate:** Water and sewer districts must plan facilities to serve existing needs and those into the reasonably foreseeable future (RCW 57.16). This could include planning time horizons, consideration of adopted growth targets, and other areas where GMA planning affects water and sewer district planning decisions.
4. **Update enabling statutes and administrative code for special districts:** Some special districts, like school districts, are governed by distinct sets of state statutes, agencies, and administrative code. The Task Force could consider how to involve the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction in updating administrative code and guidance for individual districts.

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How these problems are impacting people/groups:

- Inadequate coordination between special purpose districts and cities and counties could impact the ability to provide housing, jobs, and infrastructure for future residents under the GMA.

Statutory changes:

Several statutes could be impacted (including but not limited to the following). This could also require corresponding Washington Administrative Code (WAC) updates if legislative changes are made.

- [RCW 36.70A.070](#)(3-4)
- [RCW 36.70A.212](#)
- [RCW 57.16](#) (comprehensive plan – local improvement districts)
- [RCW 57.02](#) (general provisions, water and sewer districts)
- [RCW Title 53](#) (port districts)
- [RCW 28A.525](#) (school bond issues)
- Several of these changes will also require changes/updates to the Washington Administrative Code (WAC). For example, school district planning is guided by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) through [WAC 392-341-020](#), which requires a school district to prepare a study and survey for new facilities to be reviewed by the OSPI. OSPI produces a manual for districts that covers advance planning and also produces district-specific enrollment projections (covered in [WAC 392-343-045](#)) through an official OSPI Cohort Survival Enrollment Projection.

Budgetary impacts:

- Not known at this time. Budgetary impacts would depend on the range of changes the Task Force may consider.

New statutes or revision to existing statutes? New Revision

Complexity – time to develop recommendations: Low Medium High

Are the required changes technical, substantive, or both? Technical changes alone could be run through working groups primarily, while substantive changes (new GMA comp plan elements, for example) would have to be worked extensively through the Task Force.

Technical

Substantive

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Is this issue based on recent legislation? Yes No

If yes, link to the most recent legislation.

ATTACHMENT A

A Road Map to Washington's Future (Roadmap 1)

Many participants talked about needing better coordination between counties and cities and special purpose districts. Participants said that excluding special purpose districts from the GMA framework has spawned confusion, competition, and conflict among counties, cities, and special districts and made implementation of GMA difficult. They said that special purpose districts, such as water, sewer, school, and port districts are important components of the growth planning framework and should be integrated into GMA planning.

- Integrate water and sewer districts, school districts, and port district planning into the GMA. (p. 107)