

The King County Growth Management Planning Council (GMPC) is reviewing a set of framework policies that guide the growth management plan for each jurisdiction within King County. The GMPC currently is considering changing those policies in ways that:

- **Would cost school districts and taxpayers millions of dollars**
- **Asks school districts to provide Rural Area students with a separate and unequal education**
- **Would not prevent Rural Area growth, the reason given for these policy changes**

Proposed policy changes would restrict the use of property in the Rural Area, as defined by the Growth Management Act, to build schools for use by Rural Area students only. That and other restrictions would mean that in practice, school districts would not be able to build schools in rural areas.

The proposed changes effectively mean school district may have to replace property they already own in the Rural Area with similar properties in the Urban Area costing millions of dollars more, if they are even available. If districts want to consider using those properties they already own, they would be restricted to building small schools to serve only the students who live in the Rural Area, effectively treating them differently from their Urban Growth Area peers.

The current Countywide Planning Policies and the King County Comprehensive Plan authorize building schools in the rural area without restrictions to who can attend and allowing them to connect to a tightline sewer. No other property or building can connect to the sewer line so no additional growth is allowed. These policies have enabled schools to provide K-12 educational services to all students, urban or rural, without resulting in urban development in the adjacent rural area.

The King County Growth Management Planning Council (GMPC) considered the Proposed Policies (DP-50, PF-12, PF-18 and PF-19) at its public meeting on June 29, 2011, where school district officials expressed their concerns. The GMPC tabled the matter and will continue public comment and potentially take action at its next meeting, to be held at 4:00 p.m. on September 21, 2011. The meeting will be held at the Puget Sound Regional Council, 5<sup>th</sup> floor Board Room, 1011 Western Avenue in Seattle.

**Please contact members of the Growth Management Planning Council and urge them to vote no on the Proposed Policies and to support policies that allow school districts to efficiently and effectively deliver public education to all our students. ( Go to <http://www.kingcounty.gov/property/permits/codes/growth/GMPC/members.aspx> for contact information.)**

## Background Information –

### King County Growth Management Council Proposed Policy Changes Affecting Schools

**History.** In 1990, the statewide Growth Management Act was passed. It requires counties and cities to develop a set of framework policies to guide development of each jurisdiction’s comprehensive plan. The Growth Management Planning Council (GMPC) consists of elected officials from King County, Seattle, Bellevue, other cities and towns in King County, special purpose districts, and the Port of Seattle. Through the GMPC, jurisdictions within King County plan for economic and population growth in King County.

The GMPC developed and adopted the [Countywide Planning Policies](#), which serve as a framework for each jurisdiction to develop its own comprehensive plan. The [CPPs](#) (PDF\*, 213KB) were adopted and ratified by King County and the cities in 1994. The Countywide Planning Policies are the framework the Metropolitan King County Council used when adopting the 1994 King County Comprehensive Plan and subsequent updates.

The urban growth boundary does not align with school district and school service area boundaries nor with their interests of serving students in the most productive and expeditious manner. The King County Council acknowledged in the 1994 King County Comprehensive Plan, consistent with the adopted CPPs, that schools may be located in both urban and rural areas and authorized “tightline” sewers for schools. These tightline connections to sewers serve only the school facility and cannot be used by general development in the area. In fact, the tightline is sized only to serve the school facility, with the design effectively prohibiting others from connecting. Even if the tightline was sized to serve other properties, the King County Council would need to affirmatively approve the connection. These policies have enabled schools to provide K-12 educational services to all students, urban or rural, without resulting in urban development in the adjacent Rural Area.

**The kids come first.** School districts do not construct schools where there are no children. Taxpayers don’t vote for bond measures to build new schools until the students are actually there.  
**Building a school does not create growth: it is a response to growth.**

**Districts serve every child.** School districts must by law serve every child residing in their district. Many school districts in King County serve students residing in both the urban and the rural area, and often in multiple jurisdictions. A school sited in a Rural Area might serve neighboring children whose residences are across an arbitrary line of the Urban Growth Boundary. Why? Because that Rural Area site might be the logical service point for children in the surrounding area --- which could be rural, suburban, and/or urban. School districts identify logical service areas to ensure, among other factors, that all students in the district receive an equitable education and so that student travel time to and from school is reasonable.

**Example:** Lake Washington School District owns land for a future high school that is in the Rural Area between Redmond (Urban) and Redmond Ridge – an Urban Growth area surrounded by Rural land that King County approved and which has no suitable land for a secondary school. Should the area population grow to the point where another secondary school is needed, Lake Washington would be forced by the policy changes to bus students from Redmond Ridge to an overcrowded high school or middle school in Redmond even though the district owns land that is five minutes away.

**Districts already own “rural” sites.** The Proposed Policies would render undeveloped sites currently owned by school districts largely useless for school purposes. This policy disregards the fact that King County school districts own **15 undeveloped sites** on Rural Area land, sites with a total assessed value of **\$12 million**. The schools planned for those sites *will* serve the children who live in the surrounding rural lands—but *also* may need to serve children who live on neighboring suburban and urban lands as well. At a minimum, school districts must be allowed to use these sites for standard school needs.

**Taxpayers will pay more.** The state does not fund the cost of acquiring school sites. Local taxpayers fund the cost of school site acquisition. If districts cannot build on school sites they already own in the Rural Area and must hunt for suitable, more-expensive sites within the Urban Growth Boundary, **local taxpayers will be forced to pay the difference.**

Example: the Issaquah School District built the Pacific Cascade Middle School on Rural Area land—a project that would not be permitted under the Proposed Policies. Under the current CPPs, Issaquah acquired the Pacific Cascade land for **\$3.75 million**; purchasing a similar site in the Urban Area would have cost **\$15.6 million**. Pacific Cascade is literally across the street from the Urban Area: Urban students walk to school there. A fiscally responsible district must be allowed to consider economics in its siting decisions.

**Separate and unequal is wrong.** Conversely, if school districts used these properties for Rural Area students only as required by the policy changes, Rural Area students would not get equal educational opportunities. Schools built on these sites would be limited in size. For example, a small school would not be able to support the full array of programs such as honors classes or multiple electives. Rural students attending these smaller schools would therefore have more limited educational opportunities.

**Districts must make every dollar count.** School districts site their schools in the manner that serves all district children **most efficiently and economically**. School districts have limited funds. Recent budget cuts at the State level have further diminished the resources available for public education. School boards must consider these cost factors when making siting decisions. For example, a district may save significant transportation costs by having a centrally located school rather than busing all students from the rural area to a site located in the urban growth boundary.

**There are few urban site alternatives.** There is little available land within the Urban Growth Boundary, particularly the size of parcel needed for a school facility. Taxpayers will be forced to compete with private developers for suitable available land within developed urban areas. They will be required to pay considerably more for a site than would be necessary in other areas of the district. Many existing school sites are fully developed and capacity expansions are not possible. If suitable land cannot be located, school districts will have limited options for serving student needs. In the worst case, they may have to choose between sending students to an existing school in two shifts (“double-shifting”) or contemplating condemning and seizing land for a new school from private owners.

**Schools do not cause growth: they respond to it.** Schools are not a “growth industry” or a sign of “sprawl.” Schools must serve every child. This duty applies no less in rural areas than in urban areas.