

Growth Management Emphasis Areas and Research Priorities Report



Pursuant to Section 128(129) of the 2022 Supplemental Operating Budget, Laws of 2022, Chapter 297 (SB 5693)

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT DIVISION
GROWTH MANAGEMENT
SERVICES**

September 20, 2023

Report to the Legislature

Director Mike Fong

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Executive summary

The Legislature directed the Department of Commerce (Commerce) to develop a process to consult with stakeholders and complete a report outlining growth management emphasis areas and research priorities. The goal is to identify solutions and opportunities related to both ongoing and emerging issues in the state's growth planning framework.

Specifically, [Chapter 297, Laws of 2022](#) (the 2022 Supplemental State Operating Budget) directs Commerce to:

(129) \$10,000,000 of the general fund – state appropriation for fiscal year 2023 is provided solely for the department for grants for updating and implementing comprehensive plans and development regulations in order to implement the requirements of the growth management act.

(c) Up to \$500,000 per biennium may be allocated toward growth management policy research and development or to assess the ongoing effectiveness of existing growth management policy.

(d) The department must develop a process for consulting with local governments, affected stakeholders, and the legislature to establish emphasis areas for competitive grant distribution and for research priorities. The department must complete a report on emphasis areas and research priorities by June 30, 2023.

Commerce solicited feedback from legislators, local governments, tribes, state agencies, non-profit organizations, local government and planning associations, consultants, and institutions of higher education to develop the emphasis areas and research priority. Subject to appropriation, Commerce will continue this collaborative process each biennium as a key component of the comprehensive plan periodic update cycle.

Key findings

The consultative approach to develop a growth management research agenda produced four emphasis areas:

- Impacts on municipal services caused by population and employment growth
- Cross-jurisdictional coordination on long-term local planning objectives
- Statewide inventory of local land use issues and data for uniform analysis, regulatory streamlining, and/or development of best practices guidance
- Inventory of best practices of existing programs to use as guidance for other jurisdictions

Ten priorities emerged from these four emphasis areas for the 2023-25 growth management research agenda. These priorities closely follow emerging issues from the 2023 legislative session and collaborator feedback.

The priorities are:

- Assessing the effect of middle housing implementation on the need for water and related infrastructure
- Forecasting the effect of expanded middle housing on housing production and assessing code provisions that are most impactful on the production of middle housing
- Identifying best practices to involve underrepresented communities in the planning process
- Assessing the fiscal consequences of alternative growth strategies in Washington
- Inventorying Washington resource lands and assessment of land use policies to support natural resource based industries
- Inventorying rural lands and assessment of best practices in rural lands planning
- Assessing the role of urban tree canopy in mitigating urban heat island effects and best practices in increasing tree canopy coverage in underserved urban areas
- Identifying best practices in tribal/local coordination
- Identifying best practices in efficient local permit review

- Identifying best practice for improving coordination between local governments and special purpose districts to ensure provision of adequate public facilities and ensure timely provision of urban services

As Commerce completes an element of the research agenda, we will publish it on a soon-to-be-created webpage. It is unlikely that Commerce could complete the entire priority research agenda in the 2023-25 biennium. Next steps include assessing what research Commerce can complete within the agency's work program and identifying a means of completing the research.

Overview

During the 2022 legislative session, the Washington State Legislature provided funding to study ongoing and emerging issues in the state's growth planning framework. Through a collaborative approach, Commerce developed areas of emphasis and priorities for research. This report details that approach and outlines the priorities for research in the 2023-25 biennium.

For the 2023-25 biennium, the Legislature made additional state resources available for communities to address significant state policy issues regarding middle housing, climate and resilience, and local permit system modernization. In addition, there are no periodic update resources available for secondary competitive grant programs in the 2023-25 biennium. For these reasons, there are no current emphasis areas for competitive grants, and this report will focus on advancing a collaborative research agenda.

Study approach

Beginning in December 2022, the Growth Management Services (GMS) team developed a process for outreach to local governments and other affected stakeholders to inform them about the research opportunities and to solicit feedback. The GMS team used the problem statement method, whereby we asked respondents to identify a problem, describe the need for research, and explain how the research will address the problem.

The study approach involved three steps that GMS will repeat near the close of each biennium:

- 1) Solicit problem statements from a broad arrangement of stakeholders
- 2) Organize problem statements and suggested solutions into emphasis areas
- 3) Seek feedback to prioritize emphasis areas from members of the Legislature that represent local government legislative committees in both chambers, and from members of the [Collaborative Roadmap Task Force](#)

Solicit problem statements

The GMS team distributed a request to submit a problem statement via email in the first week of March 2023, with a response deadline of April 14. There have been conversations with legislators and local elected officials about issues of concern. Rather than expecting them to submit a problem statement, Commerce drafted a number of problem statements to reflect conversations with legislators and local elected officials about issues of concern to them. Appendix A contains all problem statements. The following recipients received a problem statement survey request:

- The planning contact for all 323 Washington towns, cities and counties
- State agencies within the Inter-governmental Working Group, which includes:
 - Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation

- Department of Commerce
 - Department of Ecology
 - Department of Fish and Wildlife
 - Department of Health
 - Department of Natural Resources
 - Department of Transportation
 - Office of the Governor
 - Puget Sound Regional Council
 - Washington Geological Survey
 - Washington State Conservation Commission
- Eastern Washington University, Urban and Regional Planning Department
 - The University of Washington, Urban Design and Planning Department
 - Growth Management Collaborative Roadmap Task Force, which includes:
 - American Planning Association
 - Association of Washington Cities
 - Building Industry Association of Washington
 - CAFÉ
 - Front and Centered
 - Futurewise
 - Puyallup Tribe of Indians
 - Washington Association of Water and Sewer Districts
 - Washington Realtors
 - Washington State Association of Counties
 - Washington State Department of Commerce
 - Washington State Department of Ecology

Organize problem statements into emphasis areas

The GMS team collected and organized problem statement submissions into four emphasis areas.

1. Impacts on municipal services caused by population and employment growth
2. Cross-jurisdictional coordination on long-term local planning objectives
3. Statewide inventory of local land use issues and data for uniform analysis, regulatory streamlining, and/or development of best practices guidance
4. Inventory of best practices of existing programs to use as guidance for other jurisdictions

Seek feedback to prioritize research

The GMS team requested that members of the Legislature and the Collaborative Road Map Task Force prioritize the problem statements, as organized into one of the four emphasis areas. Table 1 outlines the respective topics and emphasis areas for the priority research agenda. The priority research agenda pulls from three of the four emphasis areas, except cross-jurisdictional coordination on long-term planning objectives.

Table 1: Priority research agenda

Emphasis area	Research topic
Impacts on municipal services caused by population and employment growth	Assessing the effect of middle housing implementation on the need for water and related infrastructure
	Forecasting the effect of expanded middle housing on housing production and assessment of code provisions most impactful on the production of middle housing
Statewide inventory of local land use issues and data for uniform analysis, regulatory streamlining, and/or development of best practices guidance	Identifying best practices in the involvement of underrepresented communities in the planning process
	Assessing the fiscal consequences of alternative growth strategies in Washington
	Inventorying Washington resource lands and assessment of land use policies to support natural resource based industries
	Inventorying rural lands and assessment of best practices in rural lands planning
	Identifying best practices in efficient local permit review
Inventory of best practices of existing programs to use as guidance for other jurisdictions	Assessing the role of urban tree canopy in mitigating urban heat island effects and best practices in increasing tree canopy coverage in underserved urban areas
	Identifying best practices in tribal/local coordination
	Identifying best practices for improving coordination between local governments and special purpose districts to ensure provision of adequate public facilities and ensure timely provision of urban services
	Identifying best practices for improving coordination between local governments and special purpose districts to ensure provision of adequate public facilities and ensure timely provision of urban services

For the upcoming fiscal year (FY 2024), Commerce is prioritizing research that can support the implementation of recent legislation. Submitted problem statements resonate with this approach and the focus on middle housing, intergovernmental and tribal collaboration in the planning process, and rural lands planning. Commerce will seek additional feedback on an ongoing basis as the agency identifies additional problem statements and commences research.

Next steps

Commerce intends to begin the priority research in the 2023-25 biennium, although it is uncertain how much of the \$500,000 in budget authority would be allocated for this purpose. Commerce will explore the allocation of funding based on whether we can complete the research internally, or if a contracted pathway is necessary. Moreover, no funding from the 2021-23 biennium was allocated for research, as the full \$10 million appropriation is required for community updates and implementation of comprehensive plans and development regulations for the next round of Growth Management Act periodic updates.

In fall 2023, Commerce will create a webpage that hosts growth management research, and that can engage and inform key partners and the public about this ongoing effort. The webpage will also serve as the depository for this report, the current biennial priority research agenda, and all updates to the research agenda for each period funds are available for growth management planning research. The GMS team will repeat this process near the end of each biennium to maintain connectivity to community planning issues and to research solutions for them.

Commerce anticipates using this process to maintain the research priorities on an ongoing basis. As such, Commerce will solicit problem statements and update the research priorities list on a biennial basis to adjust priorities and to seek ongoing input on research needs.

Future Grant Funding

In future biennia, Commerce will also seek stakeholder feedback on priorities for future grant programs funded out of the \$10 million periodic update grant fund. All of this funding is committed to the periodic update grants for this biennia, but as funds become available, Commerce will seek input on funding priorities for any unprogrammed funding.

Appendix A: Emphasis areas and research priorities

The GMS Team compiled four themes, or emphasis areas, based on the problem statements and accompanying solution statements submitted by respondents to the March 2023 survey. These responses are unedited and presented in their entirety.

Emphasis area one and impacts on municipal services caused by population and employment growth.

Topic: Why are police not considered for impact fees?

Commenter:

Travis Goddard, City of Woodland, goddardt@ci.woodland.wa.us

Problem statement:

Why does GMA allow for Fire Impact Fees but not Police Impact Fees? Logic tells you that if development and population growth will both lead to increased demand for Fire Protection, then they should also lead to increased demand for police protection. New police positions incur costs for vehicles, weapons, recruitment, qualifications and ongoing training, and other miscellaneous equipment. Those are all one-time costs that should be subject to impact fees. New fire and medical service demands mean new capital costs like fire stations and new vehicles/equipment, just like they do for police. However, because communities build multiple fire stations but don't tend to build multiple police stations, it doesn't make sense that police aren't treated the same. If the problem is a lack of data for calculating impact fees, then a system needs to be developed.

Solution statement:

Calculating one-time expenses associated with creating positions and hiring police officers will allow for development related costs to be passed on to whomever drives that demand.

Topic: What impact has the growth management act had to stop urban sprawl?

Commenter:

Brian Shay, City of Hoquiam, bshay@cityofhoquiam.com

Problem statement:

What impact has the growth management act had to stop urban sprawl? Take a look around Lacey or Tumwater where they are subject to GMA. There has been vast urban sprawl into the undeveloped rural areas. My point is that the purpose for GMA has not been effective and might as well be repealed.

The legislature has effectively eliminated single housing zones. How will this impact the quality and character of neighborhoods? What impact will mandating 4 plexes and duplexes have on parking problems or any potential public nuisances in neighborhoods? What impact will this have on existing public facilities like parks? How will these mandatory housing standards impact private developments such as gated communities? Will there be any options for people who want to live in a single family neighborhood?

Solution statement:

How can the state redirect new housing and provide true incentives to build housing in distressed communities like Grays Harbor where there are plenty of vacant infill lots as opposed to the continued building along the I-5 corridor. If the state wants to solve the housing crisis they need to incentivize economic development in rural

areas like Grays Harbor where they have water and sewer infrastructure in place to serve double the current population after all of the economic decline since the 1970s.

Topic: More research on the relationship between housing affordability and density.

Commenter:

David Killingstad, Snohomish County, david.killingstad@snoco.org

Problem statement:

Recent OFM population projections show continued significant increases in the state population over the next twenty years. In addition, the state is currently facing a severe housing shortage. As required by HB 1220, Commerce has provided cities with their projected allocation of housing needs by income band. These allocations show large needs at lower income levels, which are best addressed by significant infill housing. More research is needed to understand the degree to which density achieves housing affordability.

Solution statement:

Quantitative analysis on the role density plays in achieving housing affordability will assist jurisdictions implementing HB 1220.

Topic: Implementation of Urban Tree Canopy

Commenter:

David Killingstad, Snohomish County, david.killingstad@snoco.org

Problem statement:

Climate Change, the Evergreen Communities Act, low impact development and public health all point to both the need for and benefits of urban tree canopy. The GMA, HB 1220 and regional plans such as Vision 2050 all mandate growth accommodation within UGAs. More research is needed to determine how to achieve both objectives without resorting UGA expansions or exclusively building multi-story buildings.

Solution statement:

Identify tangible solutions local jurisdictions can implement.

Topic: How are counties obligated and/or supposed to plan for growth and prepare for the OFM growth projections when our UGAs cannot support development due to the lack of water and/or water rights?

Commenter:

Christopher Young, Grant County, cyoung@grantcountywa.gov

Problem statement:

Moses Lake UGA is slated for 62% of Grant County's growth and they do not have any water to serve the UGA. How are counties supposed to plan and prepare for development when there is no water and/or the ability to obtain water rights? Grant County has approximately 1,000 homes that have proposed development within the Moses Lake UGA and none are able to be approved due to lack of water. The county cannot plan due to not having any water right and/or ability for a water bank since Grant County is not served by river watershed. Is DOC aware of this dilemma in the state and are they prepared to address it?

Solution statement:

Grant County will be going through a major comprehensive plan amendment, to be completed by June 2026, and we need direction on how we will be subject to meeting our projected growth numbers within our 15 UGAs. It is the same situation in all of the UGAs - no water, so how are we supposed to be GMA compliant?

Topic: Have GMA policies and rules resulted in ongoing consideration of cumulative impacts in county comprehensive and development plans; have SEPA procedures acted as a safety net in upholding this foundational component of the GMA.

Commenter:

Tracey Morgan, Responsible Growth * NE Washington, tmorgan.rgnew@gmail.com

Problem statement:

Counties design comprehensive plans and development regulations to set procedures for successfully meeting the directives of the Growth Management Act. One of the underlying principles of the GMA is to measure and moderate the cumulative impacts of growth so that, while any single action will not have deleterious effects on a county or area, numerous actions can eventually result in great damage. One such example is that WRIA 62 watershed I (Little Spokane) This water source is already in peril and caps have been placed on usage. However county comprehensive plans do not incorporate the water carrying capacity nor what the maximum developable land is when changing zones/FLU. A study on how the maximum planned growth would compare to the actual water constraints would show policy does not require consideration of the cumulative impact of increased housing basin wide. For example if all the available water is in use, how can the county 'plan' to increase single family homes in rural areas? A broad variety of environmental features are experiencing cumulative 'erosion' through failure to set the actual constraints or carrying capacity prior to changes in zoning or future land use. We propose to take Stevens, Pend Oreille, and Ferry County as case study to show plans and regulations do not use cumulative effects as a basis of those procedures, in violation of the GMA and SEPA.

Solution statement:

Showing that the current methods for projecting and planning growth may be insufficient to meet GMA standards, policy could then be developed to require elements such as carrying capacity, maximum stream bank development for a given water body, maximum acres in housing, or other ceilings so as to not exceed the capacity of the resource to survive too much growth and development. Water, air, current infrastructure, services, and presence of known species versus area or quantity could be used to define thresholds for not impacting those resources. Simple GIS exercises would show the limits in acres or number of homes and would be very affordable if the methods were well outlined for these counties.

Emphasis area two and cross-jurisdictional coordination on long-term local planning objectives.

Topic: How does the Growth Management Act inhibit the governance Tribes have over Federal Indian Reservations and land use decisions.

Commenter:

Andrew Strobel, Puyallup Tribe of Indians, Andrew.Strobel@puyalluptribe-nsn.gov

Problem statement:

Federally Recognized Indian Tribes are enshrined with unique rights and authorities over their lands. The Federal Government signed Treaties with local Tribes that both established Indian Reservations and guaranteed benefits and access to resources. While Indian Reservations and Tribal jurisdiction are largely grounded in federal legislation and judicial precedent, State and local land use policy can frequently interfere with management of Tribal lands. As such, the Growth Management Act (GMA) has historically omitted any nexus between Tribal lands and local land use as part of its framework of managing rural and urban growth. This framework can frequently be incongruous with the unique development patterns of Indian Reservations, which are neither perfectly urban nor rural in nature. Tribes are incredibly dependent on the development of local utilities, transportation, transit, and other levels of service to their lands. Many reservations in Washington State do not have the capacity to provide these services and must partner with local jurisdictions in order to provide them. However, GMA largely recognizes the relationship of providing these services only between cities and counties but very limitedly towards Tribes if at all. The ability for Tribes to be named jurisdictions in annexation proceedings, participate in right-of-way transfers, and expand utilities working with local PUDs and municipal governments is severely dampened by the absence of Tribes in GMA.

Solution statement:

Research in this area will promote suggestions to modify GMA so that Tribes and local jurisdictions may more appropriately jointly plan around Indian Reservations without fear of legal actions due to the ambiguity in State law.

Topic: Impact of partially planning jurisdictions on fully planning jurisdictions. Transfer of impacts. Lack of concurrency standards.**Commenter:**

Travis Goddard, City of Woodland, goddardt@ci.woodland.wa.us, 360-218-9147

Problem statement:

As a fully planning jurisdiction within a partially planning county, county development has a direct impact on our services without any requirement for concurrency. For example, I-5 Exit 21 is within the city and approximately 50% of the traffic comes from county-based development. So, while the city is required to develop public facilities concurrent with development, levels of service may be pushed into failure by forces outside of our control because they do not have concurrency rules. School Districts also tend to have students from both incorporated and unincorporated areas. Rural development may be subsidized by urban development based on political boundaries. There should be mitigation tool that requires development in partially planning jurisdictions so that fully planning jurisdictions can be made whole subsidizing development.

Solution statement:

Financial impacts from partially planning jurisdictions can be measured and tools for reimbursing for that cost should be considered.

Topic: This topic stems from a recommendation of the Collaborative Roadmap, Phase II project: While the GMA requires cities and counties to coordinate with special district on the development of utilities and capital facilities plans (RCW 36.70A.070(3) and (4), WAC 365-196-415 and WAC 365-196-420), statutes governing special districts are not always designed to link with planning requirements cities and counties perform.

Commenter:

Clay White, LDC Inc., cwhite@ldccorp.com

Problem statement:

While the GMA requires cities and counties to coordinate with special district on the development of utilities and capital facilities plans (RCW 36.70A.070(3) and (4), WAC 365-196-415 and WAC 365-196-420), statutes governing special districts are not always designed to link with planning requirements cities and counties perform. This is currently one of the largest gaps in our growth policy framework and one of the most important areas where progress must be made. There is often a lack of communication and coordination as long-range planning occurs and when code changes are considered by a city or county that could impact a special purpose district. As an example, there is a strong effort to encourage redevelopment in our urban areas. However, sufficient coordination between cities and existing utility districts may not be occurring to ensure that services can support the planned-for growth when it is expected to occur. This communication and planning gap does not emerge from a lack of desire to plan, but rather from a recognition that:

- Many jurisdictions and special purpose districts have limited staffing/resources to coordinate to a greater degree; and
- In most cases, statutes guiding special purpose districts are not synced with GMA requirements for planning; and
- Statutes are not synced so there are common goals regarding planning for utilities and capital facilities as growth occurs; and
- In many cases, there are many special purpose districts who provide utility and capital facilities within a particular city or county.

Solution statement:

This is the statement from the Roadmap Task Force: Convene a collaborative process(es) with, at a minimum, representatives of state agencies, cities, counties, builders, special districts, Tribal governments, and planning and environmental organizations that have experience with local and/or special district planning processes. The process shall focus on increasing planning between jurisdictions and special districts to better implement utility and capital facility planning requirements under the Growth Management Act. The process shall also focus on methods to help ensure that special districts can more fully incorporate local comprehensive plans as they plan for the utilities and capital facilities necessary to accommodate growth during the planning period. In addition, the process shall focus on identifying legislative changes that will increase coordination during permitting processes that impact special districts while limiting new planning requirements.

Emphasis area three and statewide inventory of local land use issues and data for uniform analysis, regulatory streamlining, and/or development of best practices guidance.

Topic: Creation of a single unified program to address nonpoint source pollution linking multi-agency programs to address policy, compliance and monitoring efforts for stormwater management.

Commenter:

Hugo Flores, Washington State Department of Natural Resources, hugo.flores@dnr.wa.gov

Problem statement:

The Puget Sound is an inland sea that is impacted by land uses within the jurisdiction of the SMA and GMA. Unfortunately, nonpoint source pollution is not being addressed in a unified manner. The state has many programs addressing some of the issues of nonpoint source pollution, but the lack of coordination among state agencies creates a significant waterlog in the permitting process and water quality compliance.

Solution statement:

- 1) Develop an inventory of all the different nonpoint source pollution programs among state agencies to map statutory, compliance, and timeline requirements.
- 2) Analyze and identify gaps and regulatory overlap and oversight of the different programs.
- 3) Convey a state agency working group to explore potential programs' alignment and develop coordination activities, and if necessary, draft policy and compliance guidance.
- 4) Prepare a report (findings) for legislative representatives interested in this topic.

Topic: Analysis of geologically hazardous area code provisions by local jurisdictions in Washington State under GMA.

Commenter:

Jessica Czajkowski, Washington Geological Survey, jessica.czajkowski@dnr.wa.gov

Problem statement:

Existing geologic hazard code provisions vary greatly across local jurisdictions in Washington. While this allows jurisdictions the benefit of developing unique solutions specific to their hazards, it also reveals gaps in information availability, capacity, and support for effective decision-making. According to the recent Washington State Department of Commerce Evaluation of Planning Costs report, local jurisdictions have a strongly identified need for additional technical support from subject matter experts, regardless of their size or geography. Currently, Washington Geological Survey (WGS) is engaged in a collaborative research project with the Department of Health (DOH) inventorying critical aquifer recharge areas (CARAs) and geologically hazardous areas code provisions. WGS proposes to use this collaborative inventory as the basis for developing criteria that define strong geologic hazard code provisions, evaluating existing code against these criteria, analyzing and summarizing the broad results, and communicating these results to the Department of Commerce and the greater planning community.

Solution statement:

A statewide analysis of existing geologic hazard code provisions will provide a baseline of gaps, functions and values, and identify areas where additional support may be needed. Subsequent efforts can emerge from this work such as the development of best practices guides for geologic hazard code development, and more informed feedback during comprehensive plan reviews by WGS to local jurisdictions. Recommendations for more effective code provisions and mapping information can help jurisdictions address gaps, improve sharing of information, expand understanding and awareness, and provide tools for decision-making.

Topic: Subject matter expert analysis of Critical Aquifer Recharge Area code provisions of local jurisdictions in Washington State under GMA.**Commenter:**

Nikki Guillot, Washington State Department of Health, nikki.guillot@doh.wa.gov

Problem statement:

Existing Critical Aquifer Recharge Area code provisions vary greatly across local jurisdictions in Washington. While this allows jurisdictions the benefit of developing unique solutions specific to their geology, it also reveals gaps in information availability, capacity, and support for effective decision-making. According to the recent Washington State Department of Commerce Evaluation of Planning Costs report, local jurisdictions have a strongly identified need for additional technical support from subject matter experts, regardless of their size or geography. Currently, Washington Geological Survey (WGS) is engaged in a collaborative research project with the Department of Health (DOH) inventorying critical aquifer recharge areas (CARAs) and geologically hazardous areas code provisions. DOH proposes to use this collaborative inventory as the basis for developing criteria that define strong code provisions, evaluating existing code against these criteria, analyzing and summarizing the broad results, and communicating these results to the Department of Commerce and the greater planning community.

Solution statement:

A statewide analysis of existing Critical Aquifer Recharge Area code provisions will provide a baseline of gaps, functions and values, and identify areas where additional support may be needed. Subsequent efforts can emerge from this work such as the development of best practices guides for code development, and more informed feedback during comprehensive plan reviews by DOH to local jurisdictions. Recommendations for more effective code provisions and mapping information can help jurisdictions address gaps, improve sharing of information, expand understanding and awareness, and provide tools for decision-making.

Topic: What regulations are effective in protecting and restoring ecologically important lands and where and how are local land use regulations are effective at preserving ecologically important lands? What are the root barriers in place that keep local jurisdictions from effectively protecting ecologically important lands?**Commenter:**

Rebecca Brown, Washington State Department of Natural Resources, rebecca.brown@dnr.wa.gov

Problem statement:

There are a variety of regulations that exist in Washington State that aim to protect and restore ecologically important lands. These include Growth Management Act (both comprehensive plans and Voluntary Stewardship Program), Critical Area Ordinances, Shoreline Master Programs, among others. The problem this research topics will address is the lack of data on which programs are effective at protecting ecologically

important lands. There is a lack of data that can provide information on which of these programs are most effective. Which programs are less effective and at what stage are they not effective? Is it the regulation itself? Is the implementation of the regulation, or is it compliance, or some combination of all three? The barriers to improving these regulations depend on what stage of the regulation is ineffective.

Solution statement:

Investigating which regulations are most effective at protecting and restoring ecologically important lands can assist policy-makers, jurisdictions/municipalities, practitioners, and a variety of state and non-state organizations to better implement land protection and restoration strategies including targeting certain areas for restoration, protection and/or acquisition through other means (such as incentive programs) where regulatory programs are failing. It will help to determine why regulatory programs may be lacking whether by lack of enforcement, funding, geographic specificity or any number of reasons. The research will help regulators prioritize improvements based on the ineffective stage, such as improving enforcement, adding staff capacity and training at permitting offices, improving spatial data on lands under threat, changing the regulation, and more.

Topic: What is the reason for underdevelopment of compact sites in the Urban Growth Areas? An additional question to consider is where the existing land base of parcels are available for infill and redevelopment within each Urban Growth Area in Puget Sound?

Commenter:

Rebecca Brown, Washington State Department of Natural Resources, rebecca.brown@dnr.wa.gov

Problem statement:

With increasing population in Puget Sound comes increased development inside and outside of Urban Growth Areas. Unfortunately, despite several programs and financial assistance options available, developers are not developing inside of UGAs at rate that are needed to combat wide-spread development in environmentally sensitive areas that threaten working lands. By investigating the barriers that are hampering infill and redevelopment this research topic can reveal some of the reasons why development is not happening within UGAs at the desired level. These questions aim to address the lack of information around what barriers exist to redevelopment, infill, and brownfield development within each Urban Growth Area in Puget Sound. Reducing barriers to infill and redevelopment is an important component of encouraging growth in the UGA and discouraging growth outside of UGAs – which threatens rural working lands. Several incentive programs, such as transfer of development rights (TDR) and the Landscape Conservation and Local Infrastructure Program (LCLIP) are being implemented across Puget Sound. These programs have some success, particularly in urban centers such as Seattle and Tacoma and in some counties such as King, Pierce and Thurston, but wide-spread adoption of programs like these, and other programs that encourage density-based development, is minimal. This research topic should investigate what some of these barriers are that may be hampering infill and redevelopment. Mapping infill and redevelopment areas would allow regional entities to geographically target programs that encourage infill and redevelopment. Several maps of these areas do exist, but a cooperative and combined effort to synthesize them in one place would make efforts to encourage growth inside of UGAs more effective.

Solution statement:

This research will provide data, either qualitative, quantitative or a visual/spatial representation that can help policy-makers, jurisdictions, municipalities and practitioners in growth management more effectively implement targeted programs, campaigns and mechanisms that encourage and direct growth to desired areas

instead of allowing it to continue in ecologically sensitive areas. It will provide the information for practitioners to remove these barriers to infill and redevelopment, clearing the way for better directing growth towards preferred growth areas.

Topic: Evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of local government wetland buffers through the use of the Washington Department of Ecology's (Ecology) buffer characterization tool, as detailed in Characterizing Wetland Buffers in Washington State (Ecology Publication No. 17-06-008).

Commenter:

Rick Mraz, Washington State Department of Ecology rmra461@ecy.wa.gov

Problem statement:

With respect to permit implementation, this research would focus on two main questions. The first addresses whether permits that are issued are consistent with the requirements of a jurisdiction's wetland regulations. Did a permit require the appropriate buffer width and the conditions specified in the regulations, and was the project built according to the approved site plan illustrating those conditions? The results may indicate whether wetland regulations are being consistently applied. The second question addresses the ecological condition of the wetland buffer. Has the buffer been maintained according to the permit conditions, and are there stressors currently affecting the buffer's effectiveness? The analysis may reveal that certain key stressors are common in a jurisdiction or that periodic monitoring is required to maintain buffers in the intended ecological condition. An additional emphasis and benefit would be further testing and refinement of Ecology's Buffer Characterization Tool. An updated tool will further support local government efforts to monitoring critical area permitting. An improved tool would also support policy development with respect to monitoring and adaptive management of critical areas and the recent relevant rule updates in WAC 365-195-920.

Wetland buffers are an effective strategy in protecting wetlands and the functions they provide. Providing buffers around wetlands is a primary tool used by state and local agencies in Washington State for protecting wetlands. However, several studies, including three in Washington, suggest that buffers are often not adequately established and maintained after a permit is issued (Cooke, 1992; Morrison and Julius, 2001; Snohomish County, 2014). The benefits of buffers in protecting wetland functions and values cannot be realized without effective establishment and maintenance of those buffers. As noted in Commerce's CAO Handbook, "a local government has no way of knowing if they are achieving that goal without looking at the permit process and the on-the-ground results of critical areas regulation. They need a feedback loop to help determine whether goals are being met, and if the goals are not being met, how to improve the process." A local government should be able to track the effects of decisions made in the implementation of its critical areas ordinance and produce regular status reports for the public to review. This is an important step to demonstrate that the goals and requirements of the GMA are being met. To evaluate the effectiveness of local regulations, one should evaluate the consistency of buffer requirements and whether wetland buffers were established and maintained. However, our experience indicates that a lack of data may exist on whether buffers are implemented consistent with local ordinances and whether those buffers maintain attributes that are protective of wetland functions over time. Applying Ecology's buffer characterization tool to a random sample of permits could help the local government assess the consistency of their regulatory requirements and the effectiveness in establishing the required buffers. Ecology developed a buffer characterization tool, as detailed in Characterizing Wetland Buffers in Washington State (Ecology Publication No. 17-06-008). The tool uses four metrics to characterize the condition of a wetland buffer on a project site:

- 1) The percentage of the wetland edge that is adjacent to an ecologically significant buffer
- 2) The width of ecologically significant buffer within the permit buffer
- 3) The area of ecologically significant buffer within the permit buffer
- 4) Stressors that are present within the permit buffer

The tool has not been widely used by local governments. Reasons for this may include the general lack of awareness of it and the absence of training on its use. In addition, elements of the tool, including invasive species information, data interpretation, and the guidance for using GIS, need to be updated. Updating the tool will be a natural byproduct of deploying it to study buffer implementation at the local government level. The additional use and application of the tool through this project will foster opportunities to develop future outreach and training.

Solution statement:

An analysis of the use of wetland buffers at the local government level would address two recommended levels of monitoring in the CAO Handbook: permit implementation and effectiveness monitoring. It will also result in the refinement of a tool that local governments can use to assess these monitoring needs. The information gathered can be used to strengthen local wetland programs by providing critical feedback on the effectiveness of a primary wetland protection mechanism (buffers). The tool will be transferable to local governments interested in conducting their own evaluation of wetland buffer establishment and maintenance. Local governments make extensive use of Ecology tools when managing and protecting wetlands (e.g., almost unanimous subscription to the Washington State Wetland Rating System, increasing use the Credit-Debit method for assessing mitigation adequacy, etc.). Refinement of the buffer characterization tool will promote its increased use in local government permit monitoring programs. An improved tool will also support policy development and implementation with respect to monitoring and adaptive management of critical areas and the recent relevant rule updates.

Topic: What are the best practices for measuring and tracking comprehensive plans' implementation and effectiveness with regards to equity, including metrics and tools, and integration of new practices into comprehensive planning such as environmental justice and improved engagement practices? This topic would provide research into how local jurisdictions track the their comprehensive plans' effectiveness to equitably address land use issues within a planning area.

Commenter:

Deric Gruen, Front and Centered, deric@frontandcentered.org

Problem statement:

Recent updates and research associated with the Growth Management Act (GMA) have promised progress of equity in comprehensive planning. The housing element updates aim for increased affordability and accessibility for underrepresented communities. At the same time, the Department of Commerce, legislators, and organizations such as Front and Centered and Futurewise have been working to increase climate justice and environmental justice as a necessity throughout comprehensive planning. As local governments continue to add climate justice into their work, tracking the progress will be increasingly important to determine how local action lessens the harms of environmental and human impacts within our state and better distributes the benefits.

Solution statement:

Existing tools such as the Environmental Health Disparities Map (EHDM) can be used in early planning stages to identify overburdened communities and the pertinent health threats within a planning area. However, research is needed to know how to monitor the impact of comprehensive plan's actions in a more localized manner. As comprehensive plans are implemented, it's important to know whether the measures and actions are working as intended so that the goals of the plan can be met. If a plan is not on track to meet the plan's goals, then that plan is ineffective and does not meet the mandatory or voluntary requirements that planning areas must meet. As new requirements or measurable needs arise, it is important to evaluate existing and novel metric tools to know which can be most helpful and which can be improved. The need for equity in comprehensive planning is continuing to grow, so this research can help support local jurisdictions integrate such work more smoothly.

Topic: How effectively have state infrastructure funding programs and local financing options been used to implement local comprehensive plans?**Commenter:**

Leonard Bauer, City of Olympia, lbauer@ci.olympia.wa.us

Problem statement:

Local comprehensive plans' capital facilities elements identify projected needs to serve future growth. State infrastructure programs such as Public Works Trust Fund, Community and Economic Revitalization Board, and direct appropriations from the Legislature are available to help fund these needs. In addition, the state has given authority to cities and counties to utilize local tools to fund infrastructure improvements, such as local improvement districts, transportation benefit districts, and bonding authority. Some state infrastructure funding programs have adopted criteria or rules related to assessment of funding applications' consistency with local comprehensive plans. These criteria or rules are generally quite liberal, only requiring a statement that the project is consistent (or at least not inconsistent) with the comprehensive plan. There is no required demonstration that the project meets a local priority, or is necessary to serve projected growth. In fact, local capital facilities elements typically do not provide any prioritization of needs, nor even any analysis of a project's importance to serving projected growth. As a result, significant portions of many cities and urban growth areas do not have the necessary basic infrastructure to support private investment in development. These areas are essentially not available to urban levels of development, despite being included as such in comprehensive plans and buildable lands analyses. This problem is especially acute in limiting areas available to address shortages of housing.

Solution statement:

This proposal is for a comprehensive assessment of WA cities' and counties' use of state infrastructure funds and local infrastructure funding options for facilities to enable future growth within urban growth areas. Such an analysis could address a number of key questions: How frequently are cities and counties accessing these programs and tools? How frequently is the resulting funding being targeted to address future growth needs vs. backlogs in projects to serve existing development? Are cities and counties clearly identifying and prioritizing infrastructure needs in their comprehensive plans and capital facilities elements to serve future growth? If so, are they identifying and prioritizing their use of funding tools and applications to those priorities? If not, what are the impediments to doing so?

Topic: State of the Practice for and Implementation options for the Rural Element.

Commenter:

Dave Andersen, Washington State Department of Commerce, dave.andersen@commerce.wa.gov (Reflects elected official conversations)

Problem statement:

The GMA contains a clear set of requirements for a robust planning for Rural as well as urban areas. However, there is little statewide analysis on how the rural element has been implemented.

Solution statement:

This work will produce a map showing designated LAMIRDs in Washington. It will also survey the use of rural development tools and evaluate the use and effectiveness of different rural development tools. In particular, the study will evaluate any gaps in state rural policy and assess best practices for implementing the rural element in both metropolitan and non-metropolitan counties.

Topic: The role of agricultural resource lands in preserving the agricultural economy.

Commenter:

Dave Andersen, Washington State Department of Commerce, dave.andersen@commerce.wa.gov (Reflects elected official conversations)

Problem statement:

One of the first requirements in the Growth Management Act is to designate and assure the conservation of agricultural resource lands in order to maintain and enhance the viability of the agricultural sector. Since the adoption of the Growth Management Act, counties have designated agricultural resource lands, but there is little statewide understanding of either how many acres are designated or how this has changed over time. There is a growing trend toward agricultural operations that are smaller in scale, rely on value added activities or combine agricultural production with experiences, tourism and retail. There is no clear guidance on how state policies design to enhance the agricultural industry are implemented in a way that facilitates both more conventional large-scale agriculture and enhances opportunities for new smaller scale agriculture.

Solution statement:

The study will produce a statewide map of designated agricultural, forest and mineral resource lands. The study will also review policies governing designation and dedesignation criteria and develop best practices for review of resource lands designation. The study will also review policies governing development and allowed uses in agricultural resource lands and overall policies governing small-scale value-added agriculture. The study will provide recommendations on how to adapt agricultural resource lands policy to changes in the agricultural industry.

Emphasis area four and an inventory of best practices of existing programs to use as guidance for other jurisdictions.

Topic: Develop a framework for mapping transportation efficient locations across the state.

Commenter:

Alon Bassok, Washington State Department of Transportation, alon.bassok@wsdot.wa.gov

Problem statement:

Transportation efficient communities offer transportation choices for people and goods to efficiently and safely reach their destinations. They provide affordable housing near jobs and transportation options, and transportation choices for all residents and visitors. They are communities where population and jobs should grow. Several cities in Washington state have explicitly developed transportation efficient communities, and many more would like to emulate their designs. At the same time, other communities have locations with some, if not all, of the qualities expected in transportation efficient locations. Some transportation efficient communities are well known, others are not. There is no baseline data to show where these communities exist. Lesser known communities may not be on the radar for funding opportunities to improve infrastructure. There is no inventory from which cities can model transportation efficient design, based on similar geography, demographics, and community needs.

Solution statement:

Developing a framework for mapping transportation efficient communities already established in the state will lay the groundwork for data collection and mapping, in order to:

- Establish a data baseline for prioritizing population and job growth in locations where transportation efficient communities already exist.
- Establish an inventory of best practices for other cities to model.
- Expand current knowledge of transportation efficient communities, for funding or other technical assistance opportunities.

Initial work can build on existing efforts in Washington State including the Growth and Transportation Efficiency Centers, Regional Growth Centers (Puget Sound Regional Council) and Urban Villages (City of Seattle). The final product would include a literature review and a list of specifications for what to include in a mapping effort—e.g., transit stops with frequent, all-day services, density thresholds, appropriate distance buffers, etc.

Topic: Planning for housing supply and affordability in destination communities.**Commenter:**

Dave Andersen, Washington State Department of Commerce, dave.andersen@commerce.wa.gov

Problem statement:

Most rural communities have low rates of growth and relatively low land prices. A few rural communities are strong tourist destinations. In these communities, much of the housing stock is either vacation homes or short-term rentals. This presents unusual challenges in applying standard practice for housing planning. For example, the median income is not as useful an indicator when income is not normally distributed and is highly unequal.

Solution statement:

Research will evaluate the special housing characteristics and challenges of rural destination communities and provide practice and policy recommendations on how to adapt the housing element standard practice to meet the specific challenges of destination communities.

Topic: Evaluating the cost and revenue implications of alternative growth strategies.**Commenter:**

Dave Andersen, Washington State Department of Commerce, dave.andersen@commerce.wa.gov

Problem statement:

Local governments are required to plan for and accommodate growth through a 20-year planning horizon. This includes planning for adequate public facilities such as water, wastewater treatment and capital facilities. Common practice does not evaluate a resource constrained capital facility plan beyond six years. Local governments often plan without a clear sense of the fiscal consequences of their long-term growth strategy.

Solution statement:

The solution is to put together a best practice guide that can be utilized and implemented at cities and counties. A case study with a city and county could be utilized to demonstrate how implementation of revised permitting practices can reduce timelines, stress on staff, and get permits issued sooner. This is especially important given the housing crisis. Once complete, options to incentivize implementation of these practices could also be utilized. More details available upon request.

Topic: Permitting best practices and procedures to reduce the amount of time it takes to review, and process permit applications.**Commenter:**

Clay White, LDC Inc, cwhite@ldccorp.com

Problem statement:

The timeframe to review and issue land use permits has steadily risen over the past 30 years. While statutory requirements for permit processing have remained the same, such as the requirement for a 14–30-day comment period for project permit notice of applications, new laws and requirements have made permitting more complicated. There are also other factors such as multiple departments reviewing applications and how that is internally coordinated, some jurisdiction's not amending codes to reduce redundant permit processes or lack of staffing to update codes that could reduce timeframes, optional local government permit processes that add substantial permitting time, staffing issues related to high retirement rates over the past few years, and the complexity of redevelopment projects in our most urban areas. There are ways to substantially reduce permitting timeframes. The way to reduce timeframes is an intentional process which must focus on internal department review processes, ensuring regulations are up to date and do not create overlapping requirements, reducing processes that do not add value, and implementing best practices to reduce the amount of review local governments must do on applications to achieve the same outcomes.

Solution statement:

The solution is to put together a best practice guide that can be utilized and implemented at cities and counties. A case study with a city and county could be utilized to demonstrate how implementation of revised permitting practices can reduce timelines, stress on staff, and get permits issued sooner. This is especially important given the housing crisis. Once complete, options to incentivize implementation of these practices could also be utilized. More details available upon request.

Topic: How successful has the VSP been in implementing counties to meet the program purposes?**Commenter:**

Dean C. McClary, Pierce County, dean.mcclary@piercecountywa.gov

Problem statement:

The Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) was established in 2011. Currently 27 of 39 counties are using this program as an alternative to traditional GMA CAOs. The program "Promote plans to protect and enhance

critical areas within the area where agricultural activities are conducted, while maintaining and improving the long-term viability of agriculture in the state of Washington and reducing the conversion of farmland to other uses (<https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=36.70A.700>).

The current 2023 Washington State legislative will probably pass new legislation to allow the remaining 12 counties to 'Optin-in' the VSP. What Best Available Science (BAS) is there to the program over the last 12 plus years has effectively protected critical areas in agricultural areas while enhancing agricultural activity?

Solution statement:

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The current 2023 Washington State legislative will probably pass new legislation to allow the remaining 12 counties to 'Optin-in' the VSP. What Best Available Science (BAS) is there to the program over the last 12 plus years has effectively protected critical areas in agricultural areas while enhancing agricultural activity?

Topic: What best practices for strategic planning would be effective for local governments in prioritizing implementation actions in their comprehensive plans?

Commenter:

Leonard Bauer, City of Olympia, lbauer@ci.olympia.wa.us

Problem statement:

City and county comprehensive plans typically do not prioritize or strategically analyze the implementation actions needed to carry out their comprehensive plans. Many comprehensive plans do not attempt, even at a very general level, to identify actions needed to implement them. As a result, implementation of comprehensive plans is extremely uneven and difficult, tending to be very opportunistic depending on political or funding vagaries. In addition, it is not currently possible for most local governments to track progress of implementation of their comprehensive plans. This also makes it virtually impossible at a statewide level to assess effectiveness of plans in addressing statewide GMA effectiveness.

Solution statement:

A result of this research could be specific guidance for local governments that identifies strategic planning best practices that would be most effective for local governments to identify priorities in implementing their plans. This guidance could then become part of Commerce GMS's technical assistance to help local governments utilize those best practices.