Washington State
House of Representatives
Office of Program Research

BILL ANALYSIS

Environment Committee

HB 1609

Brief Description: Concerning small parcels of land used for agricultural or rural development purposes.

Sponsors: Representatives Pike, Blake, Harris, Taylor, Griffey, J. Walsh, Young and Kraft.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Provides that there are no minimum acreage requirements in areas designated as agricultural lands or rural areas under the Growth Management Act.

Hearing Date: 1/31/17

Staff: Robert Hatfield (786-7117).

Background:

Growth Management Act.

The Growth Management Act (GMA) is the comprehensive land use planning framework for counties and cities in Washington. Originally enacted in 1990 and 1991, the GMA establishes land use designation and environmental protection requirements for all Washington counties and cities, and a significantly wider array of planning duties for the 29 counties and the cities within that are obligated by mandate or choice to satisfy all planning requirements of the GMA.

The GMA directs planning jurisdictions (*i.e*., jurisdictions that fully plan under the GMA) to adopt internally consistent comprehensive land use plans that are generalized, coordinated land use policy statements of the governing body. Comprehensive plans, which are the frameworks of county and city planning actions, are implemented through locally-adopted development regulations. Both comprehensive plans and development regulations are subject to review and revision requirements in the GMA.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Development regulations, as defined by the GMA, means the controls placed on development or land use activities by a county or city, including, but not limited to, zoning ordinances, subdivision ordinances, and binding site plan ordinances. Cities and counties may, through development regulations, establish minimum parcel sizes.

Agricultural Land and Rural Development.

The GMA directs planning jurisdictions to include in their comprehensive plans a land use element which designates the general location and the extent of uses of land, including agricultural land. "Agricultural land" is defined in the GMA as land primarily devoted to the commercial production of horticultural, viticultural, floricultural, dairy, apiary, vegetable, or animal products or of berries, grain, hay, straw, turf, seed, certain Christmas trees, finfish in upland hatcheries, or livestock, and that has long-term commercial significance for agricultural production.

Comprehensive plans must also include a rural element. The rural element of a comprehensive plan must allow for rural development, forestry, and agriculture in rural areas, and must provide for a variety for rural densities, uses, essential public facilities, and rural governmental services needed to serve the permitted densities and uses. Under the GMA, "rural development" refers to development outside the urban growth area and outside agricultural, forest, and mineral resource lands. Rural development can consist of a variety of uses and residential densities, including clustered residential development, at levels that are consistent with the preservation of rural character and the requirements of the rural element.

Summary of Bill:

The Growth Management Act's (GMA) definition of "agricultural land" is modified to specify that there are no minimum acreage requirements for agricultural land in designated agricultural areas.

The GMA's definition of "rural development" is modified to specify that there are no minimum acreage requirements for rural development in designated rural areas.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.