

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6077

As of January 11, 2018

Title: An act relating to minimum density standards for comprehensive plans adopted by cities required to plan under chapter 36.70A RCW.

Brief Description: Concerning minimum density standards for comprehensive plans adopted by cities required to plan under chapter 36.70A RCW.

Sponsors: Senators Palumbo and Takko.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Local Government: 1/11/18.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Sets a minimum density standard of no less than six dwelling units per acre for areas designated as residential in an urban growth area.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Staff: Greg Vogel (786-7413)

Background: Growth Management Act (GMA). The GMA is the comprehensive land use planning framework for counties and cities in Washington. The GMA sets forth three broad planning obligations for those counties and cities who plan fully under the GMA: the county legislative authority must adopt a countywide planning policy; the county, and the cities within the county, must designate critical areas, agricultural lands, forestlands, and mineral resource lands, and adopt development regulations accordingly; and the county must designate and take other actions related to Urban Growth Areas (UGAs).

UGAs. Counties that fully plan under the GMA must designate UGAs, areas within which urban growth must be encouraged and outside of which growth may occur only if it is not urban in nature. Planning jurisdictions must include, within their UGAs, sufficient areas and densities to accommodate projected urban growth for the succeeding 20-year period. In addition, cities must include sufficient areas to accommodate the broad range of needs and uses that will accompany the projected urban growth, including, as appropriate, medical, governmental, institutional, commercial, service, retail, and other nonresidential uses.

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.

Summary of Bill: A minimum density standard of no less than six dwelling units per acre is required for areas designated as residential in an UGA.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The state is experiencing a housing crisis, especially in central Puget Sound and Snohomish County. Costs rose in southeast Snohomish County last year by 21 percent, and because of the price hikes, the area has seen a spike in homelessness and those on a fixed income are struggling to make ends meet. The GMA, as a 27-year-old planning document, is not working well anymore. The annexations that the GMA envisioned have not materialized and this has put more pressure on unincorporated areas—areas with no infrastructure. There are some egregious examples of some UGAs that have a requirement of one unit per acre. This bill is a tool to address a significant and disturbing loss in housing affordability. The only way to get out of the housing crisis is to build more houses and this is a way to do it.

CON: There would be significant costs involved in updating comprehensive plans, and the blanket nature of this bill just will not work. It does not consider critical areas or infrastructure capacity. The bill is built on the faulty premise that zoning capacity is a constraint to well-planned growth across the state. For some areas, going denser would not be safe, affecting things like soil stability.

OTHER: Density standards should be linked to available infrastructure. Additionally, the state needs to figure out a way to assist local jurisdictions in finding middle-type zoning, options that provide four story buildings that are not necessarily out of character with single family housing next door. There are certainly bad actor cities that are not wanting to accommodate growth, but the buildable lands bill from last year allows local governments to find ways to address growth. What is right for King and Snohomish counties is not necessarily right for other counties in the state.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Guy Palumbo, Prime Sponsor; Jeanette McKague, Washington REALTORS; Ken Klein, Snohomish County Executive; Ron Main, Master Builders of King and Snohomish Counties.

CON: Carl Schroeder, Association of Washington Cities.

OTHER: Bryce Yadon, Futurewise; Jan Himebaugh, Building Industry Association of Washington.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.