



King County Executive
Randy Revelle

April 16, 1984

The Honorable Gary Grant
Chairman, King County Council

RE: Executive Proposed General Development Guide

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Enclosed for King County Council review and approval is the Executive Proposed General Development Guide, together with a proposed ordinance enacting the Guide. The Executive Proposed Guide is the result of years of work by the King County Council, Executive Departments, cities, other public agencies, and hundreds of community organizations and individuals.

When enacted as King County's new comprehensive land use plan, the General Development Guide will be the most important element of our strategy for responsibly managing growth and development. As the new basis for future land use and public facility decisions in King County, the Guide will profoundly affect our quality of life, as well as the costs of public facilities and services for existing and new residents of King County.

The process for preparing the Executive Proposed General Development Guide is noteworthy in several respects. First, the process featured early and extensive involvement of the King County Council in setting overall policy direction. Second, it featured close cooperation with the cities, towns, and other public agencies. Third, it brought to light a remarkable degree of consensus on land use goals for King County among such diverse interests as residents, developers, and environmentalists. Finally, from its very beginning the process emphasized a close relationship between policy and implementation.

In setting Executive policy direction for the Proposed Guide, I gave great weight to King County Council Motion 4152 and to the Report of the Executive Task Force on Growth Management. These two documents provided an excellent overview of the evolution of King County's growth management efforts, from the early initiative of the King County Council in the 1970s to the most recent Task Force thinking which helped refine the Executive Proposed Guide.

In addition to protecting King County's quality of life, the following principles are the basis for the Executive Proposed General Development Guide:

- o Growth should be managed so as to encourage both a strong economy and a quality environment in King County.
- o King County should encourage affordable housing and diversity in living environments, employment opportunities, and recreational/cultural activities.
- o King County's natural features should be the first and foremost consideration in determining both the overall pattern of growth and the development of specific sites.
- o King County should encourage growth to occur primarily in existing cities and urbanized areas.
- o The ability of local governments -- including cities, and towns, special districts, other public agencies, and King County -- to provide adequate and affordable public facilities and services should be an important factor in planning for growth.
- o Efficient use and conservation of energy for transportation and heating should be a major consideration in the location and types of development.
- o All parties affected by land use decisions -- King County, cities and towns, service providers, the private sector, and residents -- must work together cooperatively to manage growth responsibly.

To carry out these principles in King County, the Executive Proposed Guide encourages a growth and development pattern that recognizes the variety of natural and man-made features throughout King County, and the strong desire of King County residents to maintain that variety. The proposed growth and development pattern includes urban areas, rural areas, resource lands, and open space.

Urban areas, where most growth will locate, will include diverse living environments, thriving centers of economic development, and open space to provide scenic beauty. Rural areas will retain their pastoral character, consisting of very low density residential development, small farms, woodlots, and vital rural towns. Resource lands will be conserved for forestry, farming, and mining, providing needed jobs and products and contributing to the diversity of activity and land uses in King County. Open space will be designated throughout King County to assure future generations will continue to enjoy King County's scenic and environmental heritage.

The Executive Proposed Guide contains significant new features, while retaining and building on existing land use policies from the 1964 Comprehensive Plan and its county-wide policy amendments. The new features represent a careful but far reaching response to problems with existing policies, the lack of implementation measures, and the reactions of the King County Council and the public to the 1980 and 1981 versions of the Guide. These significant new features include the following:

- (1) The Executive Proposed General Development Guide assumes a proactive posture toward growth and its associated opportunities, and recognizes that cities are preferred locations for growth, given their existing facilities and services and their capacity for accommodating new growth.
- (2) The Proposed Guide's policies for protecting environmental quality are stronger and more specific than any preceding planning document adopted by King County. They clearly identify which environmentally sensitive features should be protected from development, and they specify how these sensitive features should be addressed in development density calculations.
- (3) The Executive Proposed Guide clearly articulates a vision of urban growth for King County which includes a diverse mixture of high and low housing densities and healthy commercial/industrial centers, all supported with adequate facilities and services. The Proposed Guide also takes a different approach in urban areas to phasing growth with facilities and services. It calls for clear and meaningful standards and giving the market greater freedom to determine the timing and location of growth, rather than using the growth reserve concept of the Second Draft Guide.
- (4) The Executive Proposed Guide calls for strong measures to protect large, long-term rural areas, distinguishing them from commercial farmlands and forests, limiting residential densities to lower levels which realistically can be supported with adequate rural services, and encouraging more diverse economic growth in incorporated and unincorporated rural towns.
- (5) The Executive Proposed Guide reaffirms adopted policies protecting farmlands and forests for long-term resource industry uses, applies the agricultural district approach to commercial forests, and calls for a similar approach to mineral resource areas.
- (6) The Executive Proposed Guide clearly specifies which facilities and services are required for responsible growth, and when they must be provided or assured for new development. The Proposed Guide also takes a new, affirmative approach to facilities and services, calling for new funding mechanisms to assure adequate facilities and services for growth rather than using deficiencies as an excuse to stop growth.

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- (7) The Executive Proposed Guide is closely tied to effective implementation, without which the best land use plans will be almost useless. The Proposed Guide is accompanied by a detailed implementation program (included as Appendix A) to show the implications of the Guide's proposed policies for King County's land use regulations, facility improvement standards, and other day-to-day activities of County government.

I would like to add two important points about our proposed program for implementing the Executive Proposed Guide. First, the implementation program includes a detailed list of actions necessary to carry out the Proposed Guide's policies. We have initially identified the following as the highest priority implementing actions:

- (1) Implementing the Proposed Guide's major land use designations (Urban Areas, Rural Areas, and Resource Lands), primarily through community plans, plan revisions, and zoning;
- (2) Preparing an Open Space Plan to identify suitable open space lands and strategies to keep them as open space;
- (3) Addressing adequate public facilities and services (including capacity inventories, funding strategies, and service standards);
- (4) Working cooperatively with the incorporated cities, towns, and affected residents to identify logical annexation and service areas; and
- (5) Preparing an Economic Development Plan to identify opportunities for economic growth in cities and unincorporated areas, as well as additional actions King County should take to encourage responsible economic development.

The Department of Planning and Community Development is now beginning preliminary work on these implementing actions. I respectfully invite the Council to help refine the priorities and timing for these and other implementation actions, after your initial review of the Executive Proposed Guide.

Second, we recognize that implementation of the General Development Guide, no matter how efficient and expedited, cannot happen overnight. Therefore, the ordinance accompanying the Executive Proposed Guide includes interim measures for addressing potential conflicts with previously adopted plans, policies, and land use regulations, until the enacted Guide is fully implemented. In addition, the Department of Planning and Community Development is now monitoring development activity to see if any trends emerge which require additional interim measures between now and when the Guide is enacted and implemented.

During the long process of reviewing and refining the Executive Proposed General Development Guide, elected and appointed public officials, community leaders, and residents have debated several critical issues. The most difficult of these issues are:

- (1) Where should King County encourage urban growth?
- (2) What areas of King County should retain their rural character?
- (3) What residential densities are appropriate for urban and rural areas?
- (4) How should growth be phased with facilities and services?
- (5) How can we best conserve resource lands -- farmlands, forests, and mineral resources?

The Executive Proposed General Development Guide provides a reasonable and effective approach to resolving each of these issues. We can expect continued debate on these issues during your review, but I am convinced from talking with residents throughout King County that reasonable people can disagree on these issues and still be committed to common goals for managing growth in King County.

My specific recommendations on how the General Development Guide should address these critical issues are summarized below.

Encouraging Urban Growth Within and Near the Cities

The Executive Proposed General Development Guide encourages urban growth in areas where public facilities and services can be provided most cost-effectively, including the cities and nearby unincorporated areas. The need for roads, utilities, open space, parks, and police/fire protection far exceed King County's resources to provide facilities and services, although they are critical to the quality and livability of our urban areas. The cities are best equipped to provide needed facilities and services, having greater authority over service provision, less territory to plan for, and greater taxing authority.

The Executive Proposed Guide calls for a cooperative approach involving the cities in planning for urban growth, including identifying areas where King County will support annexations and incorporations. Housing and employment growth will also be encouraged in unincorporated areas with existing public facilities, or in areas where these facilities can be provided cost-effectively. The approach outlined in the Executive Proposed Guide goes beyond narrow and short sighted competition for the tax base to encourage growth in locations where the needs of the region can best be met.

Proposed Rural Areas

The Executive Proposed Guide calls for preserving rural character in areas of King County that currently have very low density development and very limited public facilities, as well as characteristics that merit preservation. Some of these proposed rural areas are not disputed. Almost everyone agrees that Vashon Island, the Snoqualmie Valley, the Black Diamond/Ravensdale area, and the Enumclaw Plateau should remain rural, so future residents and visitors can enjoy their pastoral beauty and rural way of life. In addition, these areas do not make sense for urban development because of topographical obstacles to cost-effective public facilities, or because low rural densities are necessary to prevent land use conflicts with adjacent farming, forestry, or mining operations.

The other rural areas mapped in the Executive Proposed Guide -- such as the Bear Creek Plateau, the Hobart/Lake Webster area, the Lake Youngs area, and the Lake Heights portion of Soos Creek -- will probably be the focus of substantial debate. These areas are suitable for urban development because of their proximity to employment and services, and some have been designated for future urban growth by previous King County plans. These areas, however, are also exceptionally desirable for preservation as rural areas. They have not yet been subdivided to the extent urban facilities and services are required; they also contain lands suitable for farming and forestry.

Determining whether to treat these areas as urban or rural is a tough decision. For several reasons, I favor a rural designation for these areas. First, the lands designated by the Executive Proposed Guide for urban development provide ample capacity for urban growth for the next fifty years and beyond. Second, low density rural land uses in these areas would preserve opportunities for farming and small scale forestry close to cities, providing a dramatic sense of open space near areas that will become intensive centers of housing and jobs. Third, designating some of these areas as rural will help protect adjacent farming, forestry, and mining activities.

Residential Densities for Urban and Rural Areas

This issue is sure to be a major focus of debate, since it involves one of the Executive Proposed Guide's major departures from existing policies, and since it affects so much future land development. The Proposed Guide makes a clear distinction between urban and rural residential densities, based on compelling evidence of their impacts on public facilities and services, and on affordable housing choices.

The Executive Proposed Guide has an urban density objective of seven to eight dwellings per acre for those lands with suitable natural features and adequate facilities and services, and a rural density limit of one dwelling

per ten acres. Under the Proposed Guide, our land capacity for residential development remains large (over fifty years' supply at the expected rate of growth), but the development is reallocated to locations where it can realistically be supported by adequate facilities and services, and therefore be a real factor in providing affordable housing.

The Guide's proposed urban and rural densities differ sharply from the suburban sprawl encouraged by current policies and regulations throughout King County, and therefore will be controversial. I am convinced, however, of the need for these changes to: (1) encourage high quality, affordable housing and public facilities and services in urban areas where most growth will occur; and (2) preserve the character of rural areas while also avoiding the need for extensive rural public improvements. Implementing these density policies will require reconciling pending and adopted community plans through a public process which provides both equity and certainty to all concerned.

Phasing Growth with Facilities and Services

King County's large amount of land suitable for urbanization presents a problem as well as the benefit of a plentiful land supply. This problem is the massive public cost of trying to provide adequate facilities and services for growth everywhere at once. The Executive Proposed Guide calls for planning now for full urban uses and densities throughout the areas designated for long-term urban growth, letting the market determine the timing of growth where strict facility and service standards can be met, and encouraging growth in those areas where we know standards can be met and where we are focusing our public spending.

This approach to phasing growth with public facilities and services will be implemented through community plans, the Sewerage General Plan, interim low-density zoning (GR-5), and by designating Urban Growth Centers. This approach assumes the proposed boundaries between urban and rural areas will not change substantially in the future. We will reassess the validity of this approach during the County Council's review of the Proposed Guide. If the Council decides a much larger urban area is appropriate, phasing growth with services may need to be done through plan map amendments (as was proposed in the Second Draft Guide) to curtail leapfrog development and allow public service providers to plan properly.

Protecting Resource Lands

The Executive Proposed Guide calls for vigorous measures to conserve farmlands, forests, and mineral resources for productive use by resource industries. Although there is a consensus in King County on the need to conserve valuable farm and forest lands for future use, there are differing views on how best to accomplish this objective. Some say we should not allow conversion of any productive lands in King County, no matter where they are found, how small, or what the adjacent land use. Others say we should rely solely on incentives such as the purchase of development rights, or density bonuses to conserve parcels of productive land.

Despite the merits of these alternatives, we believe the approach proposed in the Guide would be more effective in conserving productive resource lands in areas where they are most likely to be used by resource industries -- in large districts with few intervening, conflicting land uses. The Executive Proposed Guide emphasizes resource districts as the most effective strategy for conserving productive lands and preserving opportunities to use those lands for forestry, farming, or mining. This approach was successfully pioneered by the King County Council through adoption of Ordinance 3064, establishing agricultural districts, and is being carried forward to include forest production districts and mining areas.

The Executive Proposed Guide calls for new boundaries for the agricultural districts, to exclude those former districts and fringe areas with less productive soils. The Proposed Guide establishes forest production districts, and also calls for an evaluation of mineral resources to determine which are located in areas where future land uses can be planned to prevent conflicts, and therefore preserve opportunities to extract these needed resources.

The Executive Proposed Guide proposes strong land use policies to: (1) prevent extensive residential development within and adjacent to resource districts, and (2) reduce the kind of economic pressures and land use conflicts that have led to the loss of our valuable resource lands in the past. In fact, adoption of new agricultural and forestry zoning is one of the top priority implementation actions needed to carry out the Proposed Guide. Outside the districts, the Proposed Guide also calls for incentives (but not regulations) to conserve forests and farms, recognizing these activities are integral parts of a rural lifestyle, and that these lands provide valuable open space in urban areas.

Conclusion

The Executive Proposed General Development Guide provides a clear, implementable, and equitable vision for managing growth and development in King County. The King County Council, the Executive Task Force on Growth Management, the cities, towns, and other public agencies, and the many private organizations and individuals who participated in preparing the Guide are to be congratulated for their leadership and hard work.

I am taking this opportunity to thank all of you for the time, energy, and expertise you devoted to this challenging and important task, and to urge your continued involvement in the vital job of implementing the General Development Guide when it is enacted. Your hard work has paid off in a new comprehensive land use plan which will benefit future generations of King County residents.

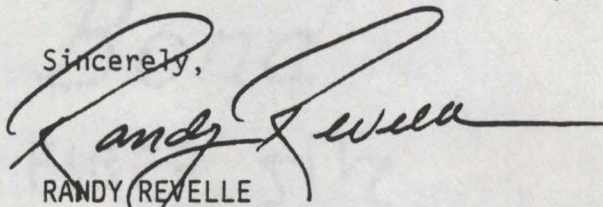
In spite of all the time, effort, and expertise devoted to preparing the Executive Proposed General Development Guide, we expect the King County Council will identify changes making it an even better land use plan. My

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staff and I stand ready to assist your efforts. The Department of Planning and Community Development will take the lead in supporting the Council's review of the Proposed Guide. The Department's primary contact will be Harold Robertson, Planning Division Manager.

We look forward to working with the County Council towards the timely adoption of a responsible land use and growth management plan for King County.

Sincerely,



RANDY REVELLE
King County Executive

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Enclosures: General Development Guide
Ordinance

cc: King County Councilmembers
ATTN: Cheryle Broom, Program Director
Jerry Peterson, Administrator
Norm Maleng, King County Prosecuting Attorney
Ruthe Ridder, King County Assessor
Charles Royer, Mayor, City of Seattle
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