Chapter 2 Issues, Assumptions, and Definitions

This chapter sets the framework for the work program we recommend in Chapters 3 through 6. It starts by listing issues that must be addressed prior to implementing the work program, and, for each issue, provides the assumption that the work program makes about the resolution of that issue. It ends with the definitions of data elements that will be used in the work program.[1]

ISSUES A WORK PLAN MUST ADDRESS

The purpose of this project is to develop a coordinated, interjurisdictional data collection and analysis strategy for Snohomish County and its cities. This strategy will form the basis for the countywide buildable lands review and evaluation to be completed no later than September 1, 2002 as required by the Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA). That purpose is consistent with the five-year reporting requirements of the GMA, but falls short of the 10-year requirement to review Urban Growth Area (UGA) boundaries.

The scope of this project is consistent with the five-year reporting requirements, but does not propose methods that fall outside of the scope of the five-year reporting requirements. The key focus of the project is in the evaluation of the adequacy of the remaining buildable land supply within UGAs.

Chapter 1 identified a number of issues that should be addressed prior to initiation of the work program. This chapter describes those issues in more detail and how the proposed methodology and work program addresses those issues.

1. POPULATION AND EMPLOYMENT FORECASTS

Most communities develop and adopt population forecasts as a basis for land use and public facilities planning. Washington State law requires the Office of Financial Management (OFM) to prepare population forecasts for all counties in Washington every five years (RCW 43.62.035). Specifically, RCW 43.62.035 states:

> "At least once every five years or upon the availability of decennial census data, whichever is later, the office of financial management

[1] The conclusions about definitions and how to resolve analytical issues were reached between February and June, 2000, through a series of meetings with the project's Technical Advisory Committee to discuss interim products provided by ECONorthwest.

> shall prepare twenty-year growth management planning population projections required by RCW 36.70A.110 for each county that adopts a comprehensive plan under RCW 36.70A.040."

Moreover, the GMA requires communities to develop and adopt comprehensive land use plans that "include population densities, building intensities, and estimates of future population growth" (RCW 36.70A.070 (1)).

The five-year GMA buildable lands analysis requires that jurisdictions "determine the amount of land needed for commercial, industrial, and housing for the remaining portion of the twenty-year planning period used in the most recently adopted comprehensive plan." (RCW 36.70A.215(3)(c)) For Snohomish County and its cities, the "remaining portion of the planning period" is the remaining portion of the 1992-2012 population and employment forecasts as represented by the growth targets for cities, UGAs, and the rural area, adopted as Appendix B of the Countywide Planning Policies on December 20, 1995. These growth targets reflect the outcome of the individual city and county GMA comprehensive planning efforts.

The buildable lands statue does not require updated forecasts (demand analysis) based on more recent information for the land supply vs. land demand comparison. Instead it clearly states at RCW 36.70A.215(1)(a) that the main purpose of the buildable lands program is to "determine whether a county and its cities are achieving urban densities within urban growth areas by comparing growth and development assumptions, targets, and objectives contained in the county-wide planning policies and the county and city comprehensive plans with actual growth and development that has occurred in the county and its cities."

Thus, the buildable lands exercise requires an assessment of original planning assumptions (growth forecasts and anticipated densities) in comparison to what has actually occurred five years into the GMA planning period. New forecasts are not a necessary requirement of the buildable lands review. Consequently, there may be areas of the County where the original 20-year forecast is probably in error (e.g., growth has proceeded at a much faster pace than anticipated). But it is not the purpose of the buildable lands review and evaluation to correct these forecasts at this point.

Instead, the County and the cities are expected to be engaged in the sub-county allocation of the new State Office of Financial Management (OFM) 20-year population forecast[2] immediately after the first buildable lands review and evaluation is completed by September 2002. The buildable land supply information contained in

[2] To be released after the Census 2000 results come out, probably late 2001 or early 2002.

the 2002 buildable lands review and evaluation report will be used by the County and its cities when conducting the sub-county allocation of the new 20-year forecasts. This will occur during the 2003-2004 time period, in time for the county to adopt an updated GMA comprehensive plan by 2005 (the latest date allowed by state law) with UGAs capable of accommodating the succeeding 20-years of projected growth.

2. DATE OF LAND USE AND BUILDABLE LANDS INVENTORY

The tax lot databases the County is presently working on will be current as of 2000; it will be updated using GIS maps in Spring 2001. Thus, the database will reflect development that has occurred during the population and employment forecast period (1992-2000). This report handles the starting point as follows: for supply side, the "as of" date will be Spring 2001; for demand side, use the 2001 *Growth Monitoring Report*.

3. USE OF GIS FOR BUILDABLE LAND INVENTORY

Many, but not all, jurisdictions will have land supply data in a GIS format. This report recommends that all land supply analysis will be in GIS format. For cities without GIS capabilities, the County will prepare the analysis.

4. LOCAL STAFF CAPABILITIES AND AVAILABILITY; USE OF CONSULTANTS

Interviews conducted with local government staff made it clear that smaller cities will not have staff time or GIS capabilities to do a full buildable land analysis at the same level of detail that larger cities and the County can. Two ways to assist those cities are with County staff or consultants.

Moreover, the County, as the expected manager and technical coordinator of the buildable lands analysis, may need to either hire more staff or consultants.

The Technical Advisory Committee was not asked to come to a conclusion about new staff or consultants as part of the development of the work program. The work program assumes that agreements on responsibilities and use of consultants for portions of the work program will be developed in the "start-up" phase of the project. Thus, the work program does not make a recommendation on consultants, and it assumes that staff time and consultant time is roughly substitutable. It presents a task-by-task budget in hours and dollars (see Chapter 3 and Appendix D for details).

DEFINITIONS

Definitions are crucial in developing a workable methodology for buildable lands analyses. It is important to use clear definitions that allow classification of land into mutually-exclusive categories. Following are definitions used for the purposes of this study. Most of the definitions are state codified definitions, presented in the CTED *Buildable Lands Program Guidelines*.

- *Buildable Land:* (See definition of lands suitable for development.)

- *Growth Target*: A figure in an adopted policy statement indicating the type and amount of growth (e.g., number of persons, households, or jobs) a jurisdiction intends to accommodate during the planning period.

- *Key Development Data*: Information that is critical to identifying the location, timing, and scope of new development that has occurred. Components may include, but are not limited to, building permits, certificates or changes of occupancy, subdivision plats, zone changes, urban growth boundary amendments, numbers of dwelling units, and critical areas and related buffers.

- *Sufficient Land Supply*: Amount of land necessary to accommodate adopted population and employment forecasts or targets for the 20-year planning period, taking into account any appropriate safety factors. (For further information, see *Issues in Designating Urban Growth Areas (Part I): Providing Adequate Urban Area Land Supply,* CTED 1992.)

- *Lands Suitable for Development* (also Net Buildable Acres): All vacant, partially-vacant, under-utilized, and redevelopable land that is (a) designated for commercial, industrial, or residential use; (b) not intended for public use; (c) not constrained by critical areas in a way that limits development potential and makes new construction unfeasible.

- *Vacant Parcels*: Parcels of land that have no structures or have buildings with very little value.

- *Partially-Vacant Land* (also referred to as *Partially-Used Land*): Tax lots occupied by a use but which contain enough land to be further subdivided or developed without need of rezoning. For low-density residential lands, tax lots over 2.5 times the minimum lot size will be considered partially vacant. For all other uses, tax lots with building coverages that leave vacant portions larger than 2.5 times the minimum allowable lot size for the underlying zoning district will be considered partially vacant.

- *Under-Utilized/Redevelopable Land*: Tax lots zoned for more intensive uses than that which currently occupies the property. For instance, a single-family home on multifamily-zoned land is considered under-utilized. This classification also includes redevelopable land, i.e., land on which development has already occurred but on which, due to present or expected market forces, there exists the strong likelihood that existing development will be converted to more intensive uses during the planning period. For the purposes of this study, redevelopable land will be considered a category of under-utilized land. Under-utilized land refers to land where a change of use to higher density occurs; redevelopable land refers to land where a similar use occurs at a higher density.

  Note that redevelopable land, as it is typically defined, deals primarily with parcels with developed structures that are judged as likely to be demolished and new buildings constructed in their place. The standard approach to identifying redevelopable land is to compare improvement value to land value. Many analyses assume that tax lots where improvement value falls below land value (a 1:1 improvement to land value ratio) are redevelopable. Not all, or even a majority of parcels that meet this criterion for redevelopment *potential* will be *actually* redevelop during the planning period. The issue of *how much* of the potentially redevelopable land will be assumed to redevelop over the planning period needs to be considered.

  An alternative approach to estimating redevelopment potential is to analyze the relationship of parcels to other surrounding parcels. For example, some jurisdictions define redevelopment potential as parcels that have improvement values significantly lower than surrounding parcels in similar designations. This approach, however, requires a property-by-property analysis using advanced GIS tools.

  Another approach to estimating redevelopment potential is to analyze land value as a function of parcel size. In general, one would expect larger parcels with lower improvement values to have higher redevelopment potential. The distribution allows analysis of the relationship between improvement value and parcel size, and shows clear breakpoints in that distribution.

- *Land Capacity:* The amount of development a parcel of land is expected to accommodate given existing zoning regulations, site conditions, and market factors.

- *Critical Areas (Constrained Land):* Constrained Land is subtracted from Total Vacant Land to get Gross Buildable Vacant Land (which is further divided into totally vacant and partially vacant based on parcel boundaries and existing development on parcels).

This definition of constrained lands includes the land area associated with both the critical area and any required buffers.

The GMA defines critical areas to "include the following areas and ecosystems: (a) Wetlands; (b) areas with a critical recharging effect on aquifers used for potable water; (c) fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas; (d) frequently flooded areas; and (e) geologically hazardous areas" (RCW 36.70A.170). Moreover, the GMA requires communities to classify critical areas and to regulate development in these areas (RCW 36.70A.050; RCW 36.70A.060).

- *Gross and Net Buildable Vacant Acres*: A *Gross Buildable Vacant Acre* is an acre of vacant land before land has been dedicated for public right-of-way, private streets, public utility easements, open space tracts, or parks, but after critical areas have been deducted. For example, a standard assumption is that about 20% of land in a subdivision is used for streets and utilities, etc: if so, then a gross buildable vacant acre will yield only about 35,000 sq. ft. (80% of a full acre) for lots. A *Net Buildable Vacant Acre* is an acre of buildable vacant land after land has been dedicated for public right-of-way, private streets, or utility easements, etc. A net vacant acre has 43,560 square feet available for construction, because no further street or utility dedications are required: all the land is in lots. *Gross-to-Net Adjustment:* Often expressed as a percent. The gross-to-net adjustment is applied to gross acres to account for land that has been dedicated for public right-of-way, private streets, or public utility easements, etc.

These definitions are a good starting point, but they will almost certainly require elaboration and clarification once the work is actually undertaken. We expand on these basic definitions in Chapter 5. Analysts should pay particular attention to overlapping definitions for *partially vacant, partially used, under-developed,* and *redevelopable* land to make sure that all land is counted, and counted only once.