

Close the **GMA Sprawl Loophole**



Protect our wildlands, ecosystems, and communities by removing a loophole in the GMA that allows urban sprawl.

Washington's Growth Management Act (GMA), introduced in 1991, ensures an alignment for land use across city and county jurisdictions. It protects our forests, streams and ecosystems from urban sprawl and determines the citing of various types of developments, including residential, commercial, and industrial facilities. However, the GMA contains a loophole that allows for unnecessary growth in our working farms and rural landscapes.

This loophole undermines the intent of the GMA by allowing counties to subvert the Growth Management Hearing Board (GMHB) appeals process to build sprawling developments that gobble up farmlands, forests, and critical habitats. It also puts a financial strain on jurisdictions to provide adequate infrastructure, facilities, and services to new developments.

LEGISLATIVE GOALS OF SB5042:

To protect forests and farmlands from harmful development, SB5042 would ensure that a small group of core yet controversial land-use changes by counties (such as Urban Growth Area expansions and farmland de-designation) are allowed to be reviewed by the GMHB before going into effect.

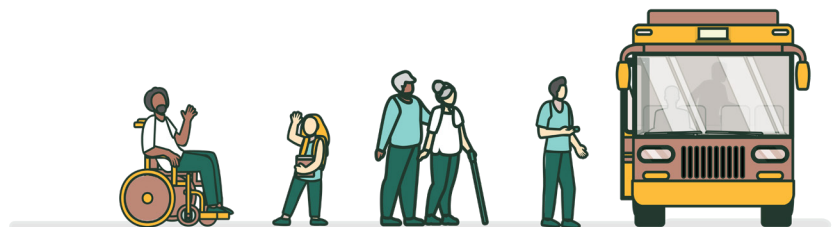
Essentially, this amendment to the GMA would prevent counties from issuing permits to developers or annexing land into a city until after the GMHB has had the opportunity to review whether their proposed land-use change is legal. If the GMHB rules against a proposed land-use change, that change will not be allowed to go into effect and existing protections will remain intact.

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WHY WE NEED TO CLOSE THE LOOPHOLE NOW

Washington state passed the GMA thirty years ago intending to help our cities and counties accommodate rapid growth while protecting what makes the Evergreen state a great place to live: vibrant cities and working farms to forests, and a beautiful rural landscape. The current sprawl loophole undermines this goal. Our state continues to attract new residents and based on recent projections, we know that we will only continue to grow.

As things stand, the loophole allows counties a way to get around an appeal of a proposed land-use decision by issuing permits or having cities annex the land. These actions have resulted in the loss of thousands of acres of farmland of long-term commercial significance and fish and wildlife habitats across the state.

It is clear that until we fix this loophole, counties will continue to abuse this process and have indicated that they will do so. This is an unsustainable and irresponsible way to accommodate our state's continued population growth. So as long as this loophole exists, there will be people who exploit it for irresponsible development on lands that we desperately need to protect.

PROGRESSIVE LOCAL REVENUE

The 2022 legislative session marks the 14th year this legislation has been introduced. We are optimistic that 2022 is the year it will be passed. In the 2021 legislative session we made progress by moving the legislation out of its Senate policy committee. We understand that this is a controversial bill and highly politicized. We need leaders and legislators who care about the environment to step up and support SB5042 in spite of the challenge.

This bill faces strong opposition from the BIAW, Association of Counties and the Realtors, who have a vested interest in maintaining growth patterns that sprawl outward into valuable farmland and wildlife habitats. It is vital that any legislator who is passionate about protecting the environment steps up to be a vocal champion for this important bill.

TRANSFORMATIONAL INVESTMENTS

Passing the GMA sprawl loophole bill will save tens of thousands of acres of farms, forests and critical natural habitats from future sprawling developments. This will not only protect our local food systems and local wildlife; it will also help us reach our state's climate goals. Focusing future growth in urban areas, especially places that are or could be served by transit, is critical to reaching our greenhouse gas emissions and vehicle miles traveled reduction targets.

