

Growth in Perspective Examined by Research Council

The Washington Research Council is reporting on the effects of the Growth Management Act, ten years after its adoption by the Washington legislature. Noting that Washingtonians continue to grapple with growth and economic development, the Seattle-based research organization is producing a series of reports called "Growth in Perspective." Each report examines an issue related to economic and population growth.

"The Washington Research Council is giving closer examination to a series of questions that came to light during our research for our REALTOR® Quality of Life program," said Quality of Life Task Force Chair Greg Wright. "We know these are important issues for REALTORS®, but we believe they are equally important issues for all citizens of our state. By having these topics researched by this independent group, we gain additional clarity and the encouragement of

knowing our Quality of Life policies reflect research done by reputable organizations that have conducted credible studies related to the effects of growth."

The first four reports are on growth and prosperity; infrastructure investment; location imbalances of jobs and housing; and the activities of local governments that promote successful growth and development. These e-policy briefs are available on the Washington Research Council's website at www.researchcouncil.org.

Decade of Growth

The council reports that prosperity cannot flourish without growth; that this increased wealth leads to increased consumption, as well as support for community development and shared resources, and a demand for more people to fill jobs in a flourishing economic market. Increased income results in increased spending for residential and commercial real estate and other property; for consumer goods;

and for business production or services. Businesses create jobs that support workers and their families. Together, workers, their families, and the businesses that employ them create wealth. Tax revenues allow people to work together to accomplish objectives too big for a few to do by themselves. Working often through government, citizens are able to build and maintain schools, parks, utilities, roads, and many other services that benefit everyone.

"As the report cites, 'Growth goes well beyond just more people and more congestion,'" Wright said. "Done thoughtfully, growth can result in more prosperity, more opportunity, and more inclination on the part of an increasing number of people to help others and improve our world.' So, the issue isn't growth versus no-growth, but how we should grow in a state where quality of life and environmental integrity are strongly held values. This reflects the REALTOR® perspective in our Quality of Life program...REALTORS® are among the state's citizens striving to maintain vibrant growth without adverse impact, and we are leading the way

in addressing the challenge of developing a public consensus that results in quality growth and protection of what we hold dear as citizens of this state."

Infrastructure

The e-policy brief "A Firm Foundation for Growth" draws on both state and national research showing Washington's need to increase investment in infrastructure, including roads, bridges, water and sewer systems, dams, jails, parks, schools, airports and transit systems. Road construction and maintenance represents the most immediate and critical demand; the Texas Transportation Institute confirmed that congestion in Seattle is among the worst in the nation. REALTOR® research showed that "all other opinions and attitudes toward growth must filter through [negative] feelings about traffic."

According to the report: In the last decade, Washington State's economy has grown by 50 percent and population by 18 percent, with state projections that more people

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are on the way. Forecasters anticipate that statewide population will grow by 280,000 people by 2005 to total 6.1 million people. To accommodate such significant population growth, well-planned and adequately maintained capital infrastructure is vital. Withholding this investment may temporarily slow the influx of people and inhibit economic activity, but it also causes sprawl and poorly planned communities, compromises the integrity of existing systems, and jeopardizes public safety, economic vitality and quality of life.

The Governor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation has made recommendations for dealing with "the state's transportation crisis," and calls for spending between \$8 and \$12 billion over the next six years. Setting priorities for this spending must be done in Olympia and in city halls. The public will support additional public investment when they believe the money is being used prudently, which means on critical projects like water and sewer systems, roads, schools and parks that facilitate appropriate development.

Balancing Jobs, Housing

The e-policy brief "Managing

Growth is a Balancing Act" addresses how imbalances in the location of jobs and housing lengthen commutes and increase congestion, as well as increase the prices of housing near job centers, particularly in the metropolitan Puget Sound region where the number of new jobs has outpaced the amount of new housing. Large-scale jobs-housing imbalances appear to be less of a problem in metro areas away from the central Puget Sound region.

Areas with a balanced job-housing ratio have shorter commutes in both time and distance, and residents are more likely to work in the city in which they live. The council calls for increasing the amount of housing close to the workplaces of the metro Puget Sound region, which will require some changes in existing regulatory policy.

Local Government Efforts

The e-policy brief "Local Government Efforts to Promote Economic Growth and Development" explains how cities and counties can encourage and discourage growth by their established policies or lack thereof.

As the research council reports, local governments often set the tone for a community's success in attract-

ing economic growth. By laying the proper groundwork coordinating planning and permit review processes, providing infrastructure, ensuring land availability through zoning ordinances, implementing effective development regulations, providing information a community can set the stage for successful efforts of working with the business community for job retention, expansion and recruitment.

Further, communities should address perception barriers that have discouraged economic development in the past. The audience should be targeted businesses the community hopes to draw, as well as private planners, real estate professionals and developers marketing and purchasing properties for development. Each community should work with businesses to determine the needs of the businesses the community hopes to attract.

Research shows that despite different approaches to managing growth across the country, some unifying axioms emerge:

- When government regulations, fees, and processes add unnecessary costs to development projects, building prices will rise unnecessarily.
- When land use policies and regu-

lations result in constricted housing supply, prices will rise.

- When government policies withhold the capital investment infrastructures necessary to accommodate growth, the community at large will bear the costs in terms of traffic congestion, pollution, overcrowding, and generally diminished quality of life.
- Time consuming processes, inconsistent policies, costly and onerous permitting and development regulations will eventually stall an area's economic engine.

When these steps are avoided and communities plan for growth in a spirit of accommodation, economic growth may ensue and enhance a region's quality of life, environmental responsibility and community vitality.

For more about the Quality of Life program, contact the Washington Association of REALTORS® at (800)562-6024. To receive advance notice of Washington Research Council publications, send your e-mail address to wrc@researchcouncil.org.

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